Short Stories.

No. 732.] Week ending January 10th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

"THE RING SHALL BE ON HER FINGER, BUT SHE SHALL NEVER MARRY."

(SEE OUR THRILLING STORY, "FORTUNE'S WHEEL.")

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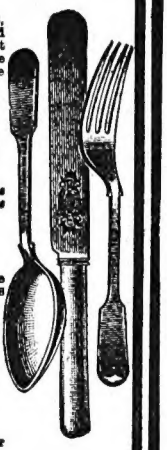

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Short Stories

No. 732.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending January 10th, 1903.

Fortune's Wheel.

See the Coloured Illustration on Cover.

"Let the gipsy tell your fortune my pretty lady! Silver—a little bit of silver—to cross the hand, and I will tell you the future—the beautiful, shining future I see before you!"

The queer old gipsy face peered up into Constance Leslie's, the shaking old voice rose into a kind of whining cry.

"Shall I, Felix?" The woman turned eagerly to the man by her side. "Shall I just let her tell my fortune, to see what she says? Now that I know what Fate has arranged for me it will be amusing just to hear what this old thing says," she added, in a whisper, whilst the sharp black eyes of the gipsy woman watched the two young people, half curiously, half indifferently.

Felix Maitland smiled indulgently down into the lovely laughing face of his betrothed, and, drawing from his pocket a silver piece, tossed it to the old woman with the words—

"Tell the lady's fortune, mother, and be sure it is a good one!"

A chuckle broke from the old woman's lips as she took the coin, and then bent over the hand Constance held out to her.

"I see a bright pathway," she said, her voice dropping into a strange, monotonous drone, "it shines to the end, and one walks it with you. All is fair—all is good, joy goes before, joy follows, unless——"

Her voice ended abruptly, and Constance glanced at her in surprise.

"Unless—what?" she asked.

"Unless you choose the wrong turning," came the reply, abrupt, short, almost harsh, and the piercing black eyes of the old gipsy looked long and searchingly into the woman's blue ones.

A little tremor passed over Constance's form.

"*Unless you choose the wrong turning,*" the gipsy repeated slowly and emphatically, with again that long, long glance, which, for some inexplicable reason sent a long shiver through Constance's frame. "Farewell, lady, farewell; sir, beware the wrong turning!" and, saying the words thus for the third time, the old woman turned away and vanished from their sight amongst the trees that bordered the lane.

For a few seconds after she left them the man and woman remained silent, then Constance said lightly—

"After all, dear, what does it amount to? Simply that if one makes mistakes in one's life, one must suffer for them. I don't know why the old thing's words gave me that odd, creepy feeling which came over me for a minute."

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Her lover laughed tenderly, putting his arm round the girl and drawing her towards him lovingly.

"Silly child!" he said softly, as his lips touched her forehead. "Fancy minding what an old beggar woman tells you! She had to say something, and she has a string of phrases which she turns on promiscuously. She is much like one of those automatic fortune-tellers after all!"

"Is she?" Constance glanced back across her lover's shoulder's in the direction taken by the old woman, and once more she shivered. Then she shrank closer into Felix's embrace, saying gently—

"Of course she is—just what you say. Don't let's talk about her any more. After all—Felix, surely you and I can defy Fate and fortune-tellers—when we are together."

"Certainly we can!" he answered gaily, "And in three weeks hence we shall be together for always, sweetheart, have you realised that? Do you remember that our wedding day is in three weeks from to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said, but there was a mechanical ring in her voice, and throughout the rest of their walk she was curiously distrait and absent. Some change seemed to have passed over the very afternoon itself. The sun, that had shone brilliantly when the two started for their walk, had sunk behind a great mass of grey cloud; a chilly wind crept up from the south-west, and set the leaves in motion, a strange shivering motion that foreboded a storm, and the birds were ominously silent.

"I wish we had not met that old woman," Constance said to Felix when, half an hour later, they entered the house where she was staying as his father's guest, "she—she was like a bird of ill-omen!"

"Oh, nonsense, dear!" Felix spoke lightly. "The coming storm is having the same effect upon you as upon the birds! You are upset, overwrought by the electricity in the air. After tea *I* will tell your fortune. I am a perfect marvel over fortunes in tea-leaves!" And thus talking and laughing pleasantly, the two joined old Mr. Maitland in the little study in which he always sat, having relapsed, after his wife's death, into bachelor habits and ways.

And whilst the trio sat together in the small, cosy room, an old gipsy woman was slowly threading her way through a tangle of undergrowth back to the gipsy camp, muttering as she went—

"Why did I say that? Why did I say that which I never meant to say? I had meant to read her a fair fortune—a

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fair fortune throughout, but the words came to me, and I must needs speak them—I must needs say that which it was willed I *should* say. 'Unless you choose the wrong turning,' I said to her—aye, and she *will* choose it, she will choose it. The gipsy's magic never fails—it never fails!"

* * * * *

"Your betrothed is a very beautiful woman, my son. Pray Heaven she be as good as she is beautiful!"

"She is, dad, she is!" The voice of the younger man was full of eager enthusiasm. "I can never be thankful enough for the good luck which threw me in her way!"

"How did you first meet her? Tell me about it again. The whole thing has come to me so suddenly, as such a surprise, tell me the story again, my boy."

Old Mr. Maitland leant back in his armchair in the study. Felix stood with his back to the mantelpiece, his handsome face illumined with love and happiness, a dreamy light in his eyes, as he looked back over the past few weeks to the day when he had first met Constance Leslie, the beautiful woman who, in three weeks, would be his wife.

He and she had arrived on the previous day at Monkswell, his father's little country cottage, and the old man had immediately fallen a captive to her charms. Now that he and his son were alone together for a few moments after the tea at which Constance had gracefully presided for them, the above questions had fallen from the lips of the elder Mr. Maitland.

"I met her," Felix said, after a moment's pause, a little smile hovering about his lips, "at the house of a mutual friend. She had only just returned from America, where she had been singing. You know she is a singer, father?"

Mr. Maitland nodded.

"I caught sight of her directly I entered Mrs. Danby's drawing-room that night. I saw her dear face, and—I loved it—from the first I loved it. She sat in the circle of light thrown by a big lamp. In its brilliance her hair gleamed golden like a halo, the colour came and went on her cheeks whilst she talked, a smile played on her lips, and, when her eyes met mine their radiance made me catch my breath in wonder. Sometimes I think Helen of Troy must have been something like my darling, and I do not wonder all the world went mad over her!"

"Helen of Troy was, perhaps, not an altogether ideal wife," the older man said drily.

"No-o—possibly not," Felix laughed happily, "but Constance will be! She is so sweet, dad, her every thought and wish seem to agree with mine. I loved her the first moment I saw her beautiful face, and—and—well, I am mad about her!" he ended abruptly, with an embarrassed smile.

"And her family? They have made you welcome?" Mr. Maitland's shrewd eyes glanced up into his son's happy face.

"She has no family, poor darling, she's an orphan and alone in the world. She has told me over and over again that she never knew what love meant until she met me."

Felix's father still eyed him gravely, but the old man said nothing, perhaps because he felt that his son was scarcely the person to whom to point out that so beautiful a woman as Constance Leslie could hardly have lived an absolutely loveless existence.

"My dear boy," he said very gently, rising and laying a hand on his son's shoulder, "God grant you all happiness! If your future wife is as good as she is beautiful, your life should indeed be blessed above the common lot of man."

"She is good!" The younger man's tones were very fervent. "She has a nature clear as crystal. I believe I know her every thought; her truth, her purity are alike flawless, and, dad, you know that a man of my character must be sure of *truth*, of sincerity in the woman he loves. It is more to me than her great beauty."

Father and son smiled at one another. Both singularly upright men, they shared an almost equal love of truth, with a detestation of insincerity that amounted to mania, and old Mr. Maitland said to himself as he went upstairs:

"God grant all may be well! I wish my boy had found a wife from amongst our old friends and acquaintances. This woman has beauty enough to turn the sanest man's head. If she is as true as she is beautiful, my son's happiness is assured. If not, she will break his heart."

Felix, left alone in the study, sat down beside the table on which the tea tray rested, and idly picked up the cup from which Constance had been drinking, looking into the mass of tea-leaves with that happy smile still on his face.

"My darling!" he whispered. "I must find her fortune here, as I promised. I must look for the shining pathway the gipsy told her would be hers. I——"

As he spoke his eyes had been riveted on the cup, which he turned slowly in his hand, and all at once his voice ceased, the smile faded from his lips, a strange, fixed expression came into his eyes.

"Heavens!" he murmured, "I must be mad, what does it mean?"

He passed his hand over his eyes, shuddering violently, as though the sight he saw transfixed him with horror, then, as if compelled to do so, he fixed his gaze once more upon the contents of the cup, while his lips moved mechanically, and words dropped from them as the words drop from one who is dreaming, or unconscious in delirium.

"Evil behind and evil before," he said slowly. "I see a black past—I see a black future—unless—unless," he frowned wearily, "unless she chooses the right turning. There was a man before—a man who—who——" He broke off suddenly, and once more brushed his hand across his eyes. "I see him kiss her"—the long shudder shook him again—"I see love in his eyes—and in hers—and her face—is—like the face of a beautiful devil!" There was a long pause, and he turned the cup in his fingers still almost mechanically. "There is evil to come," he began again after a moment. "The ring shall be on her finger—yes—on Constance's finger, but she shall not marry the man who stands with her at the altar. The register shall not be signed—because another—another——"

"Ah!—stop—stop!" The door had opened quietly. Constance herself stood upon the threshold, her face white as ashes, her eyes looking at Felix with blank, awful dismay; "what—is—it—you—say?" she gasped out, stumbling to his side; "that—that—cannot be—my—fortune—I—there was—never another. I——" and before Felix could spring from his chair, or put out a hand to help her, she had dropped down like a stone, and lay unconscious at his feet.

Too terrified at first by the ghastliness of her face to realise what she had said, Felix occupied himself in restoring her to consciousness, and only after he had seated her in the arm chair, and she had somewhat recovered her customary calm, did a wave of intolerable doubt sweep over his soul.

It was impossible to him to leave that doubt unsolved. Leaning over her, speaking in his tenderest accents, he said to her:

"Sweetheart, why were you so troubled, so upset by the words you heard me say? I promised to read your fortune—but—we know it is all nonsense! Why did it trouble you so terribly?" He spoke with apparent lightness, but his eyes scanned her face earnestly. That wave of doubt would not be at once stilled.

Constance laid a hand on his and smiled up into his face—a smile that might well have turned a stronger brain than her lover's.

"Naturally a tea leaf fortune is absurd," she said, with her

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soft, delicious laugh. "Surely you did not think *that* upset me. Oh, Felix, how funny! I think I—I was tired, dear—and—and—it was foolish of me to faint. Forgive me." The clinging touch of her hands—her fascinating smile—the lovelight in her eyes that met his, made Felix, for the moment, ashamed of his doubts, but later in the evening they recurred to his mind.

He and Constance were alone upon the terrace, in the moonlight, and after a long silence, during which his eyes had been fixed upon her face, he exclaimed brokenly:

"Do you know how I love you, my sweet? If I thought what I saw in that teacup was true—if—I thought another man had kissed your lips as I saw him do, I——"

"*Saw him?*" she panted out the words, and Felix saw that her face had grown very white—"saw someone kiss me?"

She grasped his arm, and he felt that her hand shook.

"Yes—I saw him kiss you. I saw your past," Felix spoke rapidly, hoarsely—"it was all evil—evil—and the picture was evil too. I seemed to hear a voice that said:

"'The shining pathway will all turn to blackness if she chooses the wrong turning now!' Constance—Constance"—he caught her hands and wrung them passionately—"tell me the truth—tell me if I read your past aright. Tell me the truth now. I could forgive everything—everything but deceit—tell me the truth."

His tone rang with vehement excitement, his grasp of her hands hurt her, her eyes contracted with pain—and with—was it fear?

"The truth?" she answered, twisting her head from side to side and speaking fast and nervously; "I have nothing to tell you, dear. My past—has been—has been—just what I have always told you—I was a lonely child and girl—I was a lonely woman till you came. I did not know what love meant—until—you taught me."

In the moonlight he could see her eyes wavered under his glance, and the colour came and went on her lovely face; he heard her hurried breathing and felt the trembling of the hands he held. His voice grew suddenly stern.

"Tell me all the truth now," he said, "I love you—I love you with my whole heart and soul—but—by Heaven, if I found you had deceived me I would spurn you utterly and for ever. *I can never forgive deceit.* Be true with me, dear; tell me why I saw evil—evil—evil—in your past and future. Tell me if another man ever——"

She wrenched her hands from him, her face flamed with indignation, as she drew herself up to her superb height and looked at him with gleaming eyes.

"I swear to you," she said, "that no other man has ever been anything in my life. I swear no other man has kissed my lips. The tea leaves have lied—there is nothing to tell of my past—I swear it."

She looked full into his eyes now, no wavering in her own glance, nothing but the passionate resentment of an innocent woman.

"Ah, believe me—dear," she cried, her voice breaking into tenderness; "believe in me, and love me, or I shall break my heart."

And Felix, maddened by her loveliness, shamed by her indignation into new hatred of his own doubts, caught her in his arms and held her close against his heart. But that night a whitefaced woman looked out into the moonlight, and stretched appealing hands towards the starlit sky, crying wildly.

"Was I wrong? Was I wrong after all? Have I taken—the wrong turning?"

A solemn hush fell over the congregation in the church, as Felix Maitland's voice rang out clear and firm.

"With this ring I thee wed"—as his hand slipped upon Constance's finger the golden circlet that bound her to him.

Never had the beautiful woman looked more beautiful than on the June morning when she and Felix stood side by side in the great London church, vowing to love and cherish one another till death should part them. The sun streamed in upon her golden hair, till it shone like a halo round her exquisite face—the face that had made those who watched her go up the nave in her sweeping white draperies say breathlessly:

"She looks like an angel from Heaven." And now the ceremony was nearly over! The ring was on the bride's finger; she had turned up to Felix a face radiant with happiness and triumph, and he was looking down at her in speechless love and admiration when a sudden stir at the end of the church arrested attention.

A verger hurried up the aisle and murmured a few words to the clergyman, whose face grew perturbed, and who looked at the two figures before him with a bewildered expression.

"An unforeseen event has occurred," he said at last, meeting Felix's astonished gaze, "I—I must ask you to come to the vestry before we can continue the service," and before the eyes of the greatly wondering congregation the bride and bridegroom, preceded by the officiating clergyman, made their way to the vestry. It was observed by all that the bride's face had grown as white as her dress—and that she seemed scarcely able to drag herself across the church even with the help of her bridegroom's arm—it was observed too, that he had also grown white as death—and little wonder! One sentence rang in his ears persistently, "The ring shall be on your finger but you shall not marry. The registers shall never be signed."

The verger had flung the vestry door open—the two entered the small square room—and then a cry of horror broke from the bride's lips; she staggered backwards, holding out her hands before her as though in desperate appeal.

"Ah, Jem!" she cried, "why have you come? How did you find me out?"

The words were addressed to a man who stood in the centre of the vestry, eyeing the bridal party with a cynical smile.

"Well! Who should be at your wedding but your own brother?" he said slowly, "and is this my new brother-in-law?"—he turned and gazed at Felix—"and—what *have you done with your first husband?*"

"Your *first* husband?" said Felix, "what does that mean? I *must* have the truth now."

"You shall have it—you shall have it," she cried, flinging herself on the ground at his feet, "only forgive me, and I will tell you all—all."

And to the ears of her listeners she poured out a wild story of a past in which she had married a man from whom she had long been parted.

"But he is dead—my first husband is dead," she moaned, at the end of her terrible confession.

"I daresay he is dead right enough," her brother struck in cynically, "and Miss Constance has planned a nice marriage for herself with a rich man! Sorry I put a spoke in your wheel, my dear, but I didn't quite see you marrying a good chap under false pretences."

"Is that man your brother?" Felix asked sternly.

"Yes—he is. He hates me—he always spoils my life."

"I always spoil your little games, my dear, and I always shall," the man said harshly, "if this gentleman forgives you—he'll be a fool"—and so saying the man turned on his heel and left the vestry. The other spectators had also stolen away—Felix and Constance were alone.

"Forgive me," she moaned again, looking up into his remorseless face; but he shook his head.

"I could have forgiven all but the deceit," he said, drawing away from her clinging hands, "I can never forgive that. You may wear my ring if you choose—my wife you shall never be. I never wish to see your face again," and drawing himself away from her clasp, he moved out of the vestry and out of her sight for ever.

Vera.

£5 a Week for Life.

This is the huge prize offered by *Pearson's Weekly*. For further particulars see page 43.

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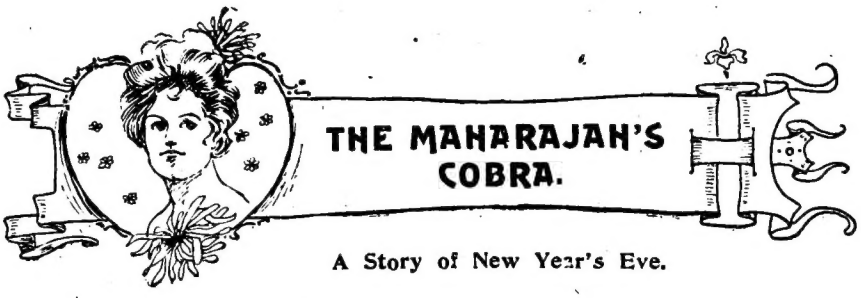

THE MAHARAJAH'S COBRA.

A Story of New Year's Eve.

It was New Year's Eve, and the air was clear, crisp, and frosty. All day long guests had been arriving, with sparkling eyes and shouts of joyous greeting, at the great grey Elizabethan mansion, in the wooded heart of Huntingdonshire, which was the country seat of that most popular of all British officers, Colonel Hawkesbury.

And now that night had stolen over the white, snow-carpeted earth, and the bright stars shone in a purple sky, the blinds were drawn about the great windows glistening with innumerable pendants of crystal ice, and the sound of gay voices and merry laughter resounded through the old and stately house.

For it was Colonel Hawkesbury's homecoming.

For five years he had been on foreign service, and an Indian sun had bronzed his handsome face to an almost Oriental hue. He was scarcely forty, for his popularity—admitted alike by officers and men—had gained him rapid promotion.

And yet, despite these numerous qualifications—his comparative youth, his handsome face and tall, commanding figure, the frank, kindly nature which had won him his popularity, and, above all, his unquestionable military skill and the bravery he had displayed in action—despite all these things, Colonel Hawkesbury was a bachelor.

There were many flippant and irreverent persons, it is true, who, owl-like, temporarily and expressively closed one eye whenever the subject was broached, and gave utterance to mysterious prophecies, which seemed to imply that the gallant officer, like themselves, still had one eye wide open, and that changes *might* be expected. And there certainly was some reason for these mysterious hints.

"Bob," said one of these prophets to another, as he meditatively chalked the end of his cue in the Colonel's billiard-room, "I suppose you noticed the arrival of the Colonel's last guest to-night?"

"Rather!" responded Bob. "I admire the Colonel's taste—what do you say?"

"You're right there," agreed Captain Tracy enthusiastically. 'For, though her profession is the art of simulating sentiment, I believe she is capable of the real article also, especially," he added with a twinkle, "where the Colonel is concerned."

"Yes," assented the Hon. Robert Winchester, "she's a jolly good actress, but she is as good a woman. I wonder whether this meeting will bring matters to a head?"

Then the two prophets, having finished their game of billiards and cigars at the same time, left the solitude of the billiard-room and joined the rest of the party in the big drawing-room, where a great log was blazing on the wide hearth, and the rosy glow of the softly-shaded electric lamps danced on the animated faces of the assembled guests and their genial host.

The Colonel's only sister was there, with her tall, military-looking husband. They had one child, a pretty, blue-eyed, curly-haired boy of five, who was a great favourite with his uncle, the Colonel. But the boy, together with the other children who had come with the Colonel's guests, was upstairs with the nurses in a big room which the master of Hawkesbury Hall dimly recollected as once being his own nursery.

Whenever the door opened the shrill laughter of the children floated down the wide staircase to the drawing-room beneath, and told that they, too, were making merry in their own particular way.

In the drawing-room the guests were amusing themselves in many ways, though all were bent on adding to the enjoyment of the party generally.

There was one other figure in the great room, almost as conspicuous as the Colonel himself.

Seated in an embrasure by one of the windows was a lady, still in the first beauty of youth, upon whose face the stamp of individuality was clearly traced, even through the wondrous changes of expression which from time to time illumined it.

It was clear, too, that Sybil Carrington, the famous English actress, owed much of her rare beauty to ancestral intermarriage with the subjects of other than British monarchs.

Indeed, her grandfather had chosen his wife among the noblest of Castilian beauties, and in Sybil Carrington the peculiar loveliness of her Castilian ancestress could be clearly traced.

The oval face, the delicate, clear-cut features, the pure olive complexion through which the rich blood mantled so warmly on the slightest provocation, were all evidences of her Spanish descent.

And beside these there were the large, black, liquid eyes through which looked forth a soul, keen, restless, and loving, and the free, proud poise of the small head, crowned with rich, heavy coils of raven hair, which were now shot through with a golden arrow.

Her slender throat was incircled by a heavy necklace of opals, set in dead gold, and her delicately tinted dress set off, by its harmonious contrast, the full measure of her dusky loveliness.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that Colonel Hawkesbury should have fallen a victim to such radiant beauty. Scores of other men had done the same, but Sybil Carrington had smiled but coldly on their amorous attentions, and they had retired discomfited. And now it really seemed as if she were making an exception in favour of the Colonel.

Presently Bob's voice was heard at the other end of the room.

"By the way, Colonel," he said, "is there any truth in the paragraph which appears in to-day's *Morning Post*, and which has reference to you?"

"I must plead guilty to complete ignorance of to-day's news," replied the Colonel.

"Curiously enough," said Bob, with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket, "I cut it out on my way down this afternoon. It's somewhere here—oh, here it is! May I read it?"

"Thank you!" said the Colonel. "We shall be delighted."

There was complete silence in the big drawing-room as Bob read the small slip of paper which he now held in his hand.

"We are informed that, before Colonel Hawkesbury's recent return to England, the Maharajah of the Province in which his regiment was quartered presented him with the thrice-sacred cobra of the temple. The creature is a magnificent specimen, and, though not yet fully grown, is considerably above the average, both in size and beauty. From an Indian point of view, no greater honour, we believe, could have been conferred on the gallant officer, though what the Colonel will do with his gruesome gift is matter for some speculation."

The Colonel fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

"Gruesome gift indeed," he assented grimly. "The editor, or the reporter, has well expressed the situation. I have no affection for such pets, and could well have dispensed with the 'honour'!"

Sybil Carrington laughed—a silvery, rippling laugh, which even the uncomfortable Colonel found infectious.

"Can't you get rid of it?" she said.

"That is what I have been endeavouring to do ever since this very questionable honour was conferred upon me,"

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retorted the Colonel. "We had not been forty-eight hours at sea when I tried to bribe the crew of the *Indus* to heave the great, perforated, jewelled casket and its loathsome occupant overboard. But the Maharajah had done the thing properly, and had deputed two villainous-looking fanatics to attend his Majesty the Cobra on the passage, and these worthies watched the reptile night and day. So it had to come to England, where, fortunately, the two attendants bade both me and their charge an affectionate adieu.

"But in England my plight was no better than at sea. I dared not shoot the brute, for that, had it become known, would have bred dissatisfaction among the Maharajah's subjects. So here I am, the nervous possessor of the finest cobra in Europe, and there is but one hope left. I shall try to shift the responsibility, with its gruesome cause, on to the shoulders of the Royal Society."

"And have you really got the brute under this roof?" asked Captain Tracy.

The Colonel nodded.

"But let me caution you," he added, "not to breathe a word of this before the servants. If they suspected the presence of such a villainous-looking visitor, they would decamp in a body. I had the casket conveyed to an empty room in the old west wing of the house. I feed the brute myself, and keep the door of the room religiously locked, so that there is little or no danger of the proximity of such a creature becoming known among the domestics. But I regret this paragraph has appeared, for it might lead to unpleasant suspicions. However, it cannot be helped. But let us change the subject, since this is scarcely conducive to unqualified enjoyment. What shall it be?"

"Ghosts," suggested pretty Mrs. Carew, the Colonel's sister.

"Almost as bad as cobras," said the Colonel with a laugh.

"As we seem slow to choose a topic," said Pat Neville, glancing across to the embrasure by the window, "may I suggest that, at Colonel Hawkesbury's request, Miss Carrington might be induced to treat us to an exhibition of her marvellous talent?"

The Colonel looked at the lady with a winning smile on his handsome face.

"The very thing," he said, "if Miss Carrington would consent to grant us so great a favour."

Sybil looked perplexed.

"With pleasure," she said doubtfully, "but how can I impersonate any existing and well-known character without the costume and scenic effects which are so indispensable to a realistic rendering of the part chosen?"

"Can you not discard those time-worn characters for the nonce, and create another on the spur of the moment?" suggested the Colonel.

Sybil laughed.

"Since we are asking questions without answering them," she said with a bewitching smile, "let me ask another. Would not that sound extremely like burlesque?"

"On the contrary," responded the Colonel warmly, "it would, to my mind, contain a deeper ring of realism than the words which we, from our very childhood, have been taught to quote. We should be wholly unprepared for the subject, and could, therefore, almost mistake for reality and truth the simulated earnestness of your words."

Sybil smiled a gracious acceptance of the Colonel's argument.

"I will do my best," she said, rising. "And, if you will allow me, I will leave you for a moment or two in order to make a few trivial but necessary preparations."

There was a murmur of pleasurable anticipation as the Colonel rose, and, courteously opening the door for the lovely actress to pass through, expressed his appreciation as much by one of those rare smiles that won his way into all hearts as by the courtly bow which accompanied it.

Scarce two minutes had passed since the closing of the door when it again opened, and the beautiful actress, with frightened dilated eyes and parted lips, rushed breathlessly into the room and closed the door behind her.

For some moments she uttered no sound, but stood, as if transfixed with fear, gazing into the face of the Colonel. Her very limbs trembled as if with uncontrollable agitation, and she pressed one hand convulsively to her heart as if to still its beating. Every lineament of the dusky face, every movement of the lithe and supple form, bespoke the utmost intensity of horror and alarm.

The eyes of all present were fascinated by the tragic spectacle, which had, almost in a moment, transformed a lovely, smiling, self-possessed woman into a terrified, horror-stricken creature, struggling to articulate the words which froze on her parted lips. In spellbound expectation the onlookers awaited, while a murmur of admiration broke from one or two. Then her words came, broken and disjointed, as she tottered to the wall for support.

"Oh, my God!" she gasped. "The cobra—the cobra! Oh, it has escaped! Come—in Heaven's name, come and destroy it before it is too late! It is on the great staircase, between us and the children! Oh, think of the little ones, who are so near the terrible thing! Even now the door may be opening, and an innocent child stepping out into that hideous death-trap. Come—you must come! Oh, why do you stand there, with your smiling faces, when death is at your very door? Oh, my God, what shall I do! Is there no one to heed me? You, who have the heart of a lion"—and she sprang to the side of the Colonel's chair—"you, who know no fear in the hour of danger—come—come you—and destroy this hideous creature that menaces the life of the little ones as well as that of ourselves!"

She stopped, panting for breath. A deep flush overspread the Colonel's handsome face, for the words she had addressed to him were music in his ears. There was a momentary silence, and then the spell was broken, and a burst of applause resounded through the room. For one moment Sybil stood, stupidly staring at the smiling faces around her, and then, with a wild, inarticulate cry, she bounded back to the door, and, again darting out, closed it swiftly behind her.

"By Jove!" said Bob, as she went out. "That was real, if you like! Do you know, I really thought she meant it until I heard everybody else applauding." And he mopped his brow nervously.

A general laugh followed this confession.

"It certainly was intensely realistic," said the Colonel, still with the flush on his face and a curious light in his eyes. "But I was prepared for it, you see, for it only bears out my argument."

And so they talked on, waiting until Sybil should return.

But outside, another and more terrible scene was being enacted.

As soon as Sybil had closed the door behind her, she glanced, with frightened eyes, up the broad staircase, and the sight which met her gaze was one calculated to inspire the bravest hearts with horror and alarm. For, half way up, coiled about the stout oak banister which skirted the staircase, and glowing in the white light of an electric lamp which hung above it, was the Maharajah's cobra.

The coils of its great body were writhing in horrible undulations, and the huge head, with its coldly glittering eyes, was uplifted to the glowing lamp, against which the cruel forked tongue was flickering to and fro and the white venomous fangs grating with a harsh, rasping sound. Evidently the monster had not noticed the reappearance of Sybil Carrington, being wholly absorbed in its enjoyment of the light and scanty warmth which the great lamp afforded it.

For a moment Sybil stood and gazed in terrified bewilder-

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ment at the writhing reptile. Then she looked about her.

"Since they will not heed me, and think I only play a part," she whispered, "I needs must do the thing myself! Yet what can I do? Where can I find a weapon?"

A passage led out of the hall at right angles, and, noiselessly traversing this, she came at last to the door of the Colonel's library.

Entering the room she felt along the wall until she touched the switch of the electric light. Instantly three or four lights blazed up around her, and, turning to the secretaire upon which the Colonel's papers were scattered, she tore open drawer after drawer with frenzied fingers, tossing the contents of each upon the floor, in a hurried search for what she knew would, in all probability, be found there.

At last her fingers touched something cold which lay at the bottom of a drawer, and, drawing it forth, disclosed a glittering six-chambered revolver. She had handled such weapons before, and a glance sufficed to show her that all six chambers were loaded. Cautiously she crept from the room, and approached the broad, brilliantly-lighted staircase.

Yes, the snake was still there, but this time it saw her, and a low, menacing hiss greeted her appearance, while the coils of its great body began slowly to unfold themselves from the banister in order to prepare its attack. At this instant the door of the nursery softly opened, and a little merry, blue-eyed boy of five ran laughing to the top of the stairs.

Sybil's heart stood still, and the hand which grasped the butt of the revolver faltered.

"Back!" she said hoarsely. "Go back and shut the door! Don't stay a moment! Quick—quick!"

But the child had caught sight of the uncoiling, glittering reptile on the staircase, and, unconscious of the danger which threatened him, saw only that the creature was beautiful. For a moment he stood gazing in wondering admiration at the great cobra, whose attention was now divided between Sybil and the child.

"Oh, isn't he just lovely!" exclaimed the boy. "I *should* like to play with him. I'm sure he wouldn't hurt me! Oh, do please go and ask my uncle if I may! Don't ask papa—ask my uncle, the Colonel—he always lets me do as I like. Oh, what's that?"

There was a flash, and a report rang through the hall. A bullet whizzed close to the cobra's head, and buried itself harmlessly in the ceiling beyond.

With a hiss of infuriated anger, the hideous monster dropped with a soft thud upon the broad staircase and began swiftly to descend.

Sybil's breath seemed to choke her as she beheld the failure of her first shot.

Slowly she moved the barrel of the revolver, following the downward course of the writhing brute, until it had almost reached the lowest stair. Then, with a brief prayer for strength, she pressed the trigger, and, with death at her very feet, waited for the smoke to clear.

One glance, and a cry of joy broke from her lips. The monster's head had been pierced by the ball, and the great folds of its hideous body were writhing in the convulsions of death.

The relief was almost more than Sybil could bear, and she staggered against the wall, almost unable to support her trembling form.

At that instant the Colonel, startled by the shots, stood in the doorway of the drawing-room. One glance up the broad staircase revealed to him all that had happened—the form of his little fair-haired nephew on the topmost stair, gazing down with wide eyes of unspeakable surprise; the rapidly stiffening body of the great cobra, not five yards from where he stood; and the trembling figure of Sybil, with the revolver still tightly clenched in her right hand, and clutching the wall for support.

In a moment his strong arm was about her, and, leading her into an adjoining room, he sent his pretty sister to her and returned to the drawing-room.

A few words informed the astonished guests of the all too realistic drama which the lovely actress had enacted—a drama which had well-nigh ended in grimmest tragedy.

One by one they peered out to view the Maharajah's cobra, now stiff and lifeless, and every voice was heard in praise of the beautiful actress who had so bravely and courageously risked her life to save them from the danger they had not believed.

Other ladies among the Colonel's numerous guests now began to leave the drawing-room in search of the lovely heroine, and it was not long before Sybil was sufficiently recovered to rejoin the rest of the party in the great room, where she was received with a burst of enthusiastic applause from all present.

The voice of the Colonel's brother-in-law shook with deep emotion as he thanked her, in a few simple, earnest words, for the noble way in which she had saved their darling's life.

Only the Colonel was silent, sitting for a long time in meditative thought, but the light had deepened in his eyes, and, when the party broke up for the night, his hand detained the retreating figure of the lovely actress and drew her unresistingly into the library, where the lamps were still aglow and the papers strewn upon the floor.

"Sybil," he said tenderly, when he had closed the door, "I will not add to the well-earned commendations you have to-night received from my guests. But there is one thing I must say, though I am sure it will not come wholly as a revelation to you. Will you not consent, by your bright presence, to fill with sunshine the home of a rough old soldier like myself? It is my only hope, my one ambition—the one cherished and predominant desire of my life. Tell me, dearest!" And, taking a step towards her, he held out his strong arms and waited.

There was no affected confusion in the lovely face that was still turned towards him—no downward drooping of the large liquid eyes that looked so frankly into his—but, with that pure and fearless love that sees no shame in sweet confession, she let the outstretched arms close about her in a lover's strong embrace.

"Sybil," he whispered in her ear, "you have made me very happy—happier than I can ever tell you; but, may I not have one word—a word that shall tell me 'tis not only I who love?"

Sybil lifted her head and gazed for a moment into her lover's eyes.

"Maurice," she said in a voice of intensest feeling, "Maurice, I have loved you even as you have loved me, and though you waited I read your purpose and was glad—waiting, too, for the time when your final return to England should give to you the opportunity you sought, and to me the greatest joy that ever gladdened a woman's heart. Does that content you? If not, then stoop your head that I, too, may confess the secret I have kept so long in a lover's lingering kiss."

* * * * *

It only remains for us to say that for some time the mystery attending the cobra's escape from its prison remained unexplained, in spite of the strictest investigation to which the Colonel subjected the occurrence.

As soon as the great creature had grown stiff in death the Colonel found the door of its prison open and the casket forced, but, though the servants were questioned, no light was thrown on the mystery.

But a strange story is current in the far-away province over which the Maharajah rules. For it is whispered among the dark-skinned denizens of that vast and mysterious jungle-land that the great white lord who dwelt among them, and upon whom their mighty Maharajah had conferred so great an honour, had violated the thrice sacred trust reposed in him by attempting the life—the immortal life—of the great Temple cobra.

And they affirm that one of its faithful attendants—Firmali the Righteous—having discovered the sacrilegious plot, had secretly followed the white lord to his great house, and, entering it all unobserved in the darkness of the night, had picked the lock of the door and set the monster free to wreak its own vengeance on the head of the unsuspecting Colonel and his guests.

Walter J. Mowbray.

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THE GIRL AND THE IDEALIST.

The Transformation which Love Brings.

The Girl sat in her chilly bedroom and stared gloomily at the wallpaper. From its cheerlessness and ugliness there seemed no way of escape. Particularly when she was discouraged did its hideousness oppress her—and she was thoroughly discouraged to-day. Discouraged with herself, her work, and the dreary unloveliness of her life.

"How can there be inspiration among such surroundings?" she sighed.

Truly, the room at best was but a blankly comfortable abiding place, although there were touches that told of a brave effort towards improvement. The feminine yearning for warm colours and graceful lines had vented itself in such trifling adornments as a limited income permitted.

But the Girl's passionate love of the beautiful was expressed all too inadequately in these pitiful attempts at decoration—attempts which seemed, after all, mere makeshifts and mockeries—caricatures of the glowing designs her imagination created.

"There is little that is lovely in my world," she said sadly, as her gaze shifted to the view from her window—smoke-begrimed roofs and chimneys showing sullen outlines in the drizzling dampness of the dull Autumn afternoon.

She rose with sudden decision and got out her hat and jacket. "I may as well walk," she said. "It is better out-doors, in spite of the weather. I will at least have fresh air."

As she opened the front door she came face to face with the Idealist, who was about to enter.

She always associated him with that name, regardless of his real cognomen. One of the boarders had used the title in speaking of him, and since then she called him that in her own mind.

"You are going for a walk?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes," she answered.

"I'll go, too, if you'll let me," he said promptly, turning round to descend the steps with her.

The Girl was somewhat astonished. It was so unlike him. None of the boarders felt at all acquainted with him—he was so quiet, so unobtrusive. No one knew much about him. Mrs. McAvoy, the landlady, surmised that he was a writer "or something" from the litter of papers usually found in his room. He had the skylight room—a cheerless affair—and often sat up late at his desk.

The Girl had really never noticed him particularly before. But just now, as he spoke to her, she observed the winning light in his eyes, the fine lines of his face.

After they had walked several paces it seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should be with her.

"You seem happy," she said to him frankly, "and on such a day! I cannot understand it."

"Why not?" he asked. "Days do not control us."

"They control me," she replied. "And so do my surroundings. You can't mean that you are independent of such things!"

"I have no time to think of them," he answered. "There is so much else. What are mere externals, anyway?"

"Oh," she cried, recollecting, "you are an idealist. I forgot. Of course you can say it. But I never could. I do not understand. It does not seem practical, somehow."

"Not practical?" he echoed. "And why?"

"What good is it?" she questioned him in return, "to deceive one's self with dreams when the cold, blunt facts of life are constantly smiting one in the face? Facts are greater than ideals or theories."

"But facts are not greater than you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that these outer things—surroundings, circumstances, conditions—are in no wise so potent as the reality of your own self—your own individuality—your own soul, if you will. That soul, that consciousness, need not dwell down among these disagreeable conditions. It may by its own decree know a life of exalted happiness."

"Beautiful," said the Girl, "but vague and vast and impossible."

"Impossible? You might say, indeed, that it was impossible for anyone to be happy on a dismal day. Can you not imagine a condition which would make one entirely oblivious of the weather?"

The Girl smiled. "Yes," she said, "I can. If one were in love, for instance."

She said it naturally and without embarrassment. He seemed the sort of man she could talk with in just that way.

"Yes," he responded quickly. "If one were in love. Now, imagine such a state of mind perpetuated—a state of mind which draws its gladness, not from externals, but from some inner realm of radiance. A state of mind dependent, not upon the meagre happiness which a grudging Fate affords, but upon such glory as comes to it through its love of humanity, its study of high things, its contact with great minds, its loyalty to duty and to truth."

"Perhaps I will understand it, too, some day," said the Girl.

"See," said her companion, "there is the promise of it in the sky. The clouds have cleared and the west is ruddy."

"But there are mud puddles at our feet," she laughingly reminded him.

"Look again and see if you can call them mud puddles," he said.

She looked and saw the rose glory of the sky reflected in them. "They are pools of beauty," she confessed.

"There!" he cried. "You are converted already."

Her dingy little room looked strangely bright when she returned to it. She felt buoyant, happy, music-filled.

"And yet these are the same surroundings," she told herself, marvelling. "After all, happiness is from within."

There were other walks and further talks with the Idealist in the days that followed.

"I see the change in you," he said to her triumphantly one day. They had returned from one of these walks and were standing together in the dim hallway.

"I, too, am changed," he went on. "A greater happiness has come to me. When one is in love——"

The Girl raised a startled face to his.

"Dearest, let me say it!" And drawing her to him he kissed her on the lips.

Angela Morgan.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ. A celebrated French artist in love with Belinda.

PAUL DE SONNAZ. A young French nobleman and friend of Lady Peggy.

The Duke and I Go into Partnership.

EASTACRES did not answer immediately. The entrance of Stanley at so critical a moment seemed to deprive him of the power of action. The blow had fallen with such crushing force that it benumbed his faculties. Stanley, tall and erect, faced the Duke, his head thrown back, his eyes flashing, his whole attitude expressive of an indignant contempt only held in check by a strong will.

For the time being neither of the men was conscious of our presence. The nature of each was antagonistic to the other; their temperaments would have clashed under any circumstances, the present state of things brought their antagonism to a white heat.

Belinda, restraining her outcry of joy at Stanley's appearance, glanced from one to the other, the light of battle in her face.

Eastacres brought the silence, the tense silence that preludes a fight, to a sudden termination.

"You will find me an inconvenient person to interfere with, Mr. Forbes. Your friend Hervé knows that, to his cost."

Belinda, with a flush of hot colour in her cheeks, interposed.

"He has been trying to murder M. Hervé," she said, "fighting a duel with a man who can't shoot. Oh, I am glad you are here, Mr. Forbes. He," and she pointed to the Duke, "is insufferable in his insolence. He dares to say he will compel me to marry him against my will. Tell him," she threw up her head, "tell him that rather than marry him I would kill him."

The Duke sneered and laughed insultingly.

"You tire me with your mock heroics, Miss Belinda," and with that he walked towards the door. Forbes stopped him with a gesture.

"Stop," he said sternly, "stop!" as the Duke paused' his hand upon the door. "You have first to hear what I have come some miles to tell you." Then, as Eastacres, with a shrug, declined to listen further, Stanley made what seemed to me a single bound across the room, and, clutching him tightly by the collar, half led, half dragged him back, helpless as a child in his firm grip.

"Listen," said Stanley, in his ringing voice, "listen, and, when you have heard me, make your choice of what I offer. Leave Paris here and now, resigning all notion of marriage with Miss North, and I will let you be in peace. Remain," his fingers tightened on Eastacres' coat, "and I will ruin you, disgrace you, force you from respectable society, publish your infamies and your dishonours, close the doors of every decent house upon you. I have it in my power to utterly discredit you, and you know it! Now," he released the Duke, stepping back a pace, "now, do you go or stay?"

"Stay!" was the answer, flung like a challenge in the other's face. "Your threats are idle. What can you do? Society will laugh at your efforts to prove me as an undesirable acquaintance as"—a vindictive look crept into his cold grey eyes—"it will jeer at your attempts to re-establish Sheila Kenwyn. You are powerless to injure me or help her. Try both if you like and see what your efforts will accomplish. Bah!" he sneered, "you are a wind-bag. What can you do with your boastful talk? Go back to your cousin, Mr. Forbes, you may, perhaps, impress her. Here we are not so easily convinced. Go back to your innocent Irish girl who——"

The sneer remained unspoken. Like a flash, Stanley had fallen on the Duke, gripping his throat with merciless hands, forcing him to silence.

"You dog!" he cried, shaking him to and fro. "You dog, another word against her and I'll kill you as you stand!"

"You shall give me reparation for this," gasped Eastacres, when Stanley at last released him. "You shall fight me or be known throughout the length of Paris as a coward."

"I don't fight with men of your stamp," was the answer. "I cane them. No," as Eastacres sprang forward, raising his hand to strike the other's face, "no, it's no use, you are powerless. I could crush you with a blow. You may take this"—he laid his hand heavily on the Duke's arm—"You may take this as a token of what I shall do with you in the future if you remain in Paris. I will give you one last chance—Go!"

"Never," returned his Grace, "I shall remain, and in defiance of your threats and prophecies I shall achieve my end. He laughs best who laughs last. I shall have cause for merriment at the end, Mr. Forbes," with which the Duke, after a sweeping bow to Belinda and myself, departed, not, I thought, without some of the honours of war.

It was past three o'clock when Belinda and I at last regained the Hotel D'Arteuil. The events of the evening had much

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tried me. I was beginning to despair of Belinda, despair of marrying my charge. The thought fell on me cold and grey as a mist from the marshes that unless I were very clever, very careful, the twenty thousand pounds would slip through my fingers. I remembered the Duke's words that morning in Cairo, when we drove to the docks at Boulag. He had sworn he would force Belinda into marriage with him; I had tried my best to bring it about and I had failed. It might be that I should be compelled to adopt the Duke's plan after all.

Somehow or other, the mystery of the midnight duel in Hervé's studio leaked out, and formed the chief topic of conversation in Parisian society. Belinda's part in the affair was magnified to an almost incredible extent. It was reported that she had received the shot intended for the artist, and had been severely wounded. Only the sight of her, serene and smiling, in the Bois, reassured Society as to her safety. Her popularity was immensely increased, and the number of proposals she received, and, alas, refused, grew more numerous daily.

I spoke to her, imploring, upbraiding, even threatening, but my speeches and reproaches were alike of no avail. The girl really possessed no taste. It is impossible otherwise to account for her determined rejections of the many brilliant offers she received. Some of the handsomest, most distinguished men of France laid their titles and their fortunes at her feet. To them all she turned a deaf ear. The love of David Carr seemed a talisman against which power and fortune, position and prestige fought in vain.

The Marquis de Fontenoy, a young and extremely fascinating man of good family and assured income, was dismissed without a second thought. Baron Rolla, the famous financier, came next on the list. He was middle-aged, of vast fortune and great personal charm. He was more diplomatic than Fontenoy, and laid siege to Belinda by slow, almost imperceptible degrees. Hardy North was terribly discouraged at Belinda's conduct, and wrote expressing his strong disapproval of her treatment of the Duke.

Stanley Forbes, after his dramatic entrance at the studio, passed for the time being out of sight. He was not seen in fashionable Paris, but was reported to be living in a charming villa on the outskirts of the town.

Eastacres also had disappeared. He had left the Hotel D'Arteuil quite suddenly, in response to a summons from the Duchess, and the date of his return to Paris was uncertain.

Meantime, Baron Rolla took advantage of every opportunity to further his suit. He took Belinda and me for long excursions in his motor-car, arranging some charming and novel expedition almost daily, and, rumour said, neglecting his business in consequence. The girl's every inclination and her slightest whim were law. Did she express a wish to help a charity, relieve a society or hospital in urgent need of funds, a cheque from Baron Rolla was immediately forthcoming. He worshipped, almost adored her. And she, a mere girl in her teens, accepted his worship as a matter of course, as a mere incident in her life. It is marvellous how unconscious, how egotistical a young girl can be! Rolla had known the most beautiful and the most accomplished women of his time. Rumour said that not a few had been more than willing to share his future and his fortune. Hitherto, however, the Baron had remained untouched, only to fall a victim to blue-eyed seventeen!

One day, returning from a spin to Versailles, we encountered of all people in the world, Mark Striven and Honoria! Belinda gave a cry of recognition.

"Please stop," she said to the Baron, "I want to get out, I simply must speak to Honoria."

Fearful of complications, I followed. Honoria was a fool, and in my experience I have known a fool prove more dangerous than many a wise man.

Honoria was looking better dressed than usual, but there was still the same air of depression, the same suggestion of fear that had characterised her before marriage. She brightened at the sight of Belinda, however, and led her aside, leaving me to hear Mark's fulsome compliments. He talked loudly, but not loudly enough to drown Honoria's voice.

"*Belinda*," she clutched my *protegée* in the old appealing fashion, "you aren't going to marry Eastacres?"

"Of course not, I've told you so a hundred times, Honoria!"

"But he says you are, and that"—Honoria broke off and glanced fearfully at her husband, "Belinda, whatever you do, don't come to us. We've taken a house just outside Paris"—she raised her face and spoke with a strange emphasis "a house where all sorts of strange and dreadful things could happen and no one be any whit the wiser. You mustn't come there, Belinda, no matter what they say or what they tell you, *don't* come."

"Honoria, you're silly," said Belinda mildly. "Of course I shall come and see you in your home, and bring Lady Peggy with me. You're looking very nice, dear." Then, with a quick change of voice, "Is he kind to you?" pointing to Mark.

A look of terror flashed into the poor thing's face. Mark had overheard the question and was waiting for her answer.

"Kind?" she said, with a hysterical attempt at a laugh, "that's not the word, Belinda. He's a devoted, yes, a most devoted husband."

Then with a flush in her sallow cheeks she dropped Belinda's arm and hastened to that most devoted husband. Turning to look after them as they entered the Luxembourg Gardens—almost deserted at that hour—I saw him raise his hand—a a moment later I heard a scream, a woman's scream. On the instant the memory of a dark and passionate face flashed across my mind—the face of El Hamed, the Egyptian, touched with the light of a great love—love for Honoria! And at the thought I sighed.

At the same time I resolved not to encourage Honoria; marriage had merely increased her opportunities and capacities for mischief.

Eastacres had been foolish to marry his sister to Mark Striven. As I told him, he would have done better to keep her single.

I had yet to learn the part he had determined Honoria should play.

That night was the occasion of a ball held at the Hotel du Nord—a subscription ball for the benefit of a popular charity. All the newspapers had puffed it weeks beforehand, and great ladies had vied with each other in the sale of tickets. All classes were represented there—high born women of the old school, *grandes dames* of the Faubourg St. Germain, wealthy foreigners, a good sprinkling of the financial element, and some representatives of the wealthy middle classes.

Millionaries elbowed each other, and their wives fairly blazed with diamonds.

The ball had arrived at that stage when only real beauties look well, those who, like Belinda, can withstand the glare of the gaslights and the incessant waltzing; the others fade and wither like flowers in the sunlight, and the blue circles under their eyes betray their age with the indiscretion of a birth register.

People were getting *blasé*, even Belinda for once showed signs of boredom, when an incident took place that raised the jaded spirits of all present.

Fashionable Paris is in touch with all the scandal of Mayfair, and gossip had been very rife in both capitals concerning Stanley Forbes' quarrel with the Duke. It was known that a woman was the cause of the disagreement, and the name of Sheila Kenwyn crept into the discussion. This being the case, you can judge of the sensation that ran through the room on the announcement that Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Forbes had arrived. The sensation was increased a thousandfold when Stanley and his wife appeared. He looked

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unusually distinguished, and leaning on his arm, pale and fragile, but exquisitely lovely, was—Sheila Kenwyn — or, I should say, Sheila Forbes.

It was a most daring and most audacious and most extraordinary thing to do. To marry a girl with a past like Sheila's was a mad or a chivalrous thing, according to one's point of view. To introduce her in public, to throw her, as it were, in the face of Society, was courageous or nonsensical, according to the result. A visible thrill ran through the assembly. Stanley advanced towards the Duchess de Chartres, who, as patroness of the charity, received the guests at the ball given in its aid. It was an awkward moment for her. According to her behaviour during the next few minutes Society would decide on its treatment of the girl. If the Duchess received her the world of fashion would receive her also. If the great lady declined to notice her, we should follow suit, and, casting her from our midst, condemn her to outer darkness.

I was sorry for the girl. She had been cruelly deceived, and had suffered for her folly. There were plenty of women whose faults were far less worthy of excuse than Sheila's, but their faults were in secret. They were not the cause of a scandal. The Duchess de Chartres herself had more than one shady chapter in her life, but with consummate skill she had kept them from the knowledge of all but her intimates. Sheila had displayed no such finesse.

The Duchess—remembering perhaps certain passages with Stanley, and retaining some of her old tenderness for him—advanced with heightened colour to receive them. At the moment when her Grace was about to shake hands with Mrs. Forbes there was a slight stir among the guests assembled round a door at the other end of the apartment. A slight figure pushed a way through the throng, a slight figure with a set face and cold, grey eyes.

Eastacres had chosen this very moment for his return to Paris.

He came forward rapidly, and stood a little to the right of the Duchess, in line with Sheila. At the sight of him she lost her nerve, the hand that the Duchess was about to press dropped limp to her side. She gave a little startled cry, and clung to Stanley's arm.

It was an awkward predicament; women without courage have no business to depart from the straight path of custom and conventionality; at any rate, having once left they should not return to it. Such returns distress themselves and other people.

I was sorry for Stanley. He had played a bold game, a game that would have proved successful but for Sheila's cowardice and Eastacres' malignity.

As it was she all but fainted. There would have been a scene—a scandal, had not Belinda, with that calm self-confidence that marked her out, come to the rescue.

She went quickly to the girl's side, grasped her hand in a firm, I had almost said manly, clasp.

"It is nice of you to have come," she said. "I wanted to see you *so* badly." Her voice or her touch reassured the girl. She raised her head, stammered a few words of greeting, and Belinda whirled her off to a seat in the conservatory.

For a moment Eastacres' triumph had been turned to defeat, but it was not for long.

Some half an hour later the two girls reappeared. Stanley advanced to meet his wife. Eastacres approached to greet Belinda. With a low bow he murmured a compliment on her appearance. Belinda, staring straight in front of her, paid no more attention to his Grace than if he'd been a statue or a footman.

"My dear," I murmured in an agony, "what are you thinking of? For Heaven's sake, Belinda, answer the Duke! Everybody's looking. Whatever will they say?"

"I don't wish to speak to the Duke of Eastacres," said the terrible girl in her clear voice. "I don't like him, he's not the sort of man I care to know. In future I shan't know him. Paul"—she turned to De Sonnaz—"I think this is our dance." And without the least compunction, she waltzed off the Comte, leaving the Duke white with rage and nearly mad with mortification.

"You shall pay for this," he said to Stanley, as the latter passed, "and within a week." Sheila shuddered, and clung closer to her husband. Stanley smiled scornfully, and passed on.

The next moment the Duke offered me his arm.

"Come," he said briefly, "I want to speak to you." He piloted me skilfully through the crowded rooms until we reached an ante-chamber where we might hope to be left undisturbed. Then with a look in his eyes and a twist about his mouth that caused me some uneasiness, he opened the conversation.

"What are you going to do about Belinda?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't follow you, Duke," I replied.

"Nonsense," he answered rudely. "You know what I mean quite well. But if you prefer plain language you shall have it. How are you going to secure that provision for your old age that Belinda's marriage would give you? Don't play the hypocrite," he added savagely, "I've no patience with that sort of thing just now. I know as well as if you had told me the terms on which you agreed to find a titled husband for the girl. You were ruined in Hammond's Bank, and but for Hardy North's offer you'd have been stranded. Now"—he brought his face level with mine—"the question is: How are you going to secure your terms? You've done your best to cajole and coerce Belinda into taking a husband. You've tried me and half a dozen other men. But she's refused them all. Now I'm going to try in my own fashion and my own way, and I'm going to succeed. By yourself you've failed, and you'll continue to fail, and as a result at the end of a year or two years at most, you'll be penniless."

He smiled quite calmly but most evilly as he spoke, and with the remembrance of that scene in the ball room upon me I could not repress a shudder.

"I repeat, you will be penniless, unless you come into partnership with me. Consider"—he laid his hand upon my arm—"it's your only chance. No other man would be skilful enough, clever enough, brave enough to do what I propose. Listen"—he bent his head and whispered in my ear. As he spoke my heart almost ceased to beat and I turned cold.

"You consent?" he asked when he had finished. "Will you help me?"

For a moment I paused. The nature of his plan, the thing he asked me to help him bring about, made me feel faint and dizzy. If—if he should play me false, if he should break his word——

"Eastacres," I cried, "are you doing this as a mad scheme of revenge against Belinda?"

"On my honour, no, merely as a means to induce, or, if you will, force her to become my wife. You risk nothing, you gain everything by the attempt, why do you hesitate?"

Again I paused. Belinda's face rose before me. Her eyes, large, clear, limpid as a child's. It was like plotting to hurt a child to plan to injure her. And yet she had been very obstinate, very tiresome. It was nonsensical to suppose she would or could be happier married to that miserable engineer than as the Duchess of Eastacres. And, besides, I had to consider myself. The thought of a penniless old age was one I could not bear. Belinda must be made to do what was best for her.

"I consent," I said, and clasped Eastacres' hand.

"Very good," he answered, "between us we shall conquer."

"When is it to be?" I asked, and despite myself the colour left my cheeks and my lips twitched as I spoke.

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"Within a week, on the day of the races. By-the-bye, don't bet on Forbes' horse, Lady Peggy. I hear he has no chance." Eastacres' eyes glittered as he spoke. I thought of his words not five minutes since to Stanley: "You shall pay for this within the week."

The races were within a week. Stanley had entered a horse and backed it heavily! Remembering these things and bearing in mind Eastacres' words, I felt that Stanley might have cause for apprehension. I did not warn him, however; it was not my business.

During the next week I lived in a state of nervous tension, waiting impatiently for the all-important day, the day when Eastacres was to carry out his scheme. My *protégée* meantime daily grew more lovely and more courted.

The morning of the races dawned fair and fresh. Belinda was in high spirits, she had donned Stanley's colours—mauve and green—and looked, so Baron Rolla told her, like the spirit of Spring. We went down to the course some few miles out of Paris, on the Baron's motor. Rolla was more infatuated than ever. It was evident to my mind he would propose to Belinda before the day was out. For her own sake I hoped she would accept him. His title was hereditary, not bought, and his wealth and prestige tremendous.

The racecourse was a brilliant sight. There were gathered statesmen, heroes, celebrities, royalties—their rivalries forgotten in their eagerness for sport. Diplomatists who had lately been quarrelling over the knotty points of national frontiers, now only vied for a twenty franc rosebud from a pert and pretty *bouquetière*; Knights of the Garter and Knights of the Golden Fleece, who had hated each other with the deadliest rancour with the width of the Channel between, became friends over a mutually good book on the race. Brains that were the power depôts of one half of Europe let themselves be fanned into amusement by a fair idiot's coquetry, or lulled into quiescence by the persistent cries of eager bookmakers.

Stanley's horse, Maraschino, was a beautiful, satin-skinned chestnut. As I looked at the glossy bow of his neck, the width of his magnificent ribs, marked his high-bred, delicate-looking head, I felt a contempt for the Duke's capacity to injure Stanley's chances of success. Maraschino was good to win against a much more powerful field than would gather against him. His jockey, a famous rider from the Newmarket stables, was true as steel. Neither horse nor rider could be got at. The Duke for once, I felt convinced, had missed his mark.

But I was yet to learn the full extent of Eastacres' purpose.

At last the signal for the start was given. Maraschino broke away with the force of a pent-up torrent suddenly let loose. He shook himself clear of all the horses and led off in a grand canter in front of his chief rival, a French bay mare.

Half way down the course his jockey turned pale, swayed in his saddle, fell forward, resting his head almost in his arms. The glittering throng spreading over the plains gazed in amazement; they thought the famous English jockey was dead beat, and sneered at his failure.

"He's been doctored," said Stanley between his teeth, and gazed savagely round, seeking with eagle eye to detect the man who had done so foul, so base a thing.

Eastacres smiled serenely and passed his glasses to a woman at his side, an opera singer famous for her diamonds, and her lack of morals. Belinda glanced indignantly at Eastacres. I, remembering what was to happen to her after the race, caught my breath, and waited.

The field swept on with a rush. Maraschino, startled at first to miss the guiding hand upon his rein, recovered his nerve and bending his mettle to the task, put out his strength, and gained once more the advantage over his foes.

On, on, till they came into the straight, and a great cry breaks from the throng.

"Maraschino, Maraschino leads!"

And then, in a gasp of horror, rises as a single cry from a thousand throats:

"The jockey! Look at the jockey. *The dead jockey wins!*"

(*Next week tells of what happened to Belinda after the race.*)

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AND

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If you are	60	you will have received	£2,600.
„	50	„ „	£5,200.
„	40	„ „	£7,800.
„	30	„ „	£10,400.
„	20	„ „	£13,000.
„	15	„ „	£14,300.
„	12	„ „	£15,080.

From this table you will be able to calculate exactly the amount of money which will come to you.

The first set of pictures will appear in the issue of *Pearson's Weekly* published on January 23rd. Order a copy to be reserved for you.

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FOR GLADYS' SAKE.

A Pretty Little Tale of a Sister's Devotion.

"I WANT to go on the merry-go-round."

"Nonsense, child! come along at once." And the eldest Miss Norman caught her sister's arm and tried to pull her past the piece of waste ground on which a feeble attempt at a fair was encamped.

The Norman girls were the daughters of a retired Colonel, who imagined himself an invalid, and, having lived his own life, had no particular wish that his girls should live theirs. So he had bought a cottage in this remote fishing village, and lived in the utmost seclusion. He was scornfully tolerant of his practical eldest girl, who acted as his housekeeper, and he considered Alice, the youngest, commonly called Baby, a decided nuisance, but he was intensely proud of Gladys, the second girl, and the beauty of the family. For her he intended at some future date, to conquer his indolence, and give the beautiful girl a chance in the great world. The three girls were accustomed to go freely about alone, since their governess had been dismissed a year ago, on the ground that Baby was too stupid to learn anything more, and there was no use wasting money on her.

Baby was nearly seventeen, and it was therefore quite impossible for her elder sisters to sanction her joining in the amusement of the fair.

"I do so want a turn, Nellie," she said. "What harm will it do? I shall go whether you let me or not."

"I've got the purse," significantly responded Nellie, clasping closer the shabby little *portemonnaie* wherein reposed the slender pocket money of the three sisters.

Baby dived her hand into her pocket, and, discovering a stray penny, she tossed it to the man who was just starting the merry-go-round again, and sprang into a gilded car. The elder sisters were powerless to stop her, and could only exchange dismayed glances, as Baby swept past, her loose hair floating on the summer breeze, her face bright with mirth and mischief.

"Oh, if father were to come by, what *would* he say?" murmured Gladys, looking round to make sure no fatal chance had brought that upright figure strolling round the bay. Her glance met a pair of laughing dark eyes, fixed in mingled amusement and admiration on her face. A young man had just been rowed ashore from his yacht, and, springing up the bank, had been an amused witness of Baby's little escapade and her sisters' consternation. The merry-go-round was beginning to slow down, preparatory to coming to a stop, and Baby sprang out, slipped, and fell heavily. In a moment, the stranger had raised her, and was reassuring the frightened sisters.

"It's nothing," he said. "She can't be hurt; she fell on the grass. She's only shaken."

"It's my foot," murmured Baby, scarlet with confusion. "Let us get away. Gladys, you must give me your arm home."

"I think you had better have mine," said the stranger, but Baby disengaged herself, and tried to move away. The attempt was a failure, and she was glad to catch at the arm the young man hastily offered.

"You see," he said, with a kindly smile. "Indeed, you had better let me help you home. My name is Rex Thornecliffe. I am here for a few days on my yacht."

"We are Colonel Norman's daughters," Nellie introduced herself and her sisters. "I don't like to trouble you, but I'm afraid we could not get my little sister home without your aid. We live in that cottage on the hill in the distance."

"No trouble at all," he returned. "Did you say Colonel Norman? My father had a very dear friend of that name in his young days."

"That couldn't be father," said Baby, decidedly. "He *never* could have been anybody's dear friend."

"I have heard father speak of a friend of his called Daylesford Thornecliffe," observed Gladys.

"That's my father. They were old friends, I believe, but lost sight of each other after my father came in for his brother's estate, and left the Army."

"You must come in and make father's acquaintance," said Nellie. "He'll be delighted to see you. We live very quietly because of father's health, but I know he will be pleased to see the son of his old friend."

So when the party reached the cottage, while Nellie hurried Baby away to have her foot attended to, Gladys conducted Rex Thornecliffe into her father's presence. The young man had the good fortune to please the old autocrat, and after spending an hour or so with him, was dismissed with the genial request to look upon "The Cottage" as his home during his stay.

"And what about James Fleming?" asked Baby. She was sitting on the window-seat, devouring with healthy appetite, a slice of bread and butter covered with apricot jam. Gladys stood beside her, gazing with dreamy eyes into the wood behind the house. At Baby's question, she started.

"What do you mean?"

Baby finished her bread without answering, looked lovingly at the jam pot which stood conveniently at hand on the window ledge, and seemed contemplating a fresh attack.

"You'll spoil your dinner, and make yourself sick," went on Gladys. "Leave the jam alone, and tell me what you mean."

Baby pushed the jam pot aside, and threw herself, a heap of white cambric, on the floor.

"Oh, isn't it hot?" she sighed, stretching her arms above her head. "What was I saying? Oh, I know. Yes; Gladys, what about James Fleming?"

"What in the world do you mean, Baby?" demanded Gladys, turning from the window, and fixing flashing eyes on her sister.

Baby closed her eyes languidly.

"That voice of cold anger is so refreshing," she murmured. "You are nicer than Nell when you get angry. You get into a cold fury and speak in an icy voice, but Nell gets red and her very voice sounds hot."

"Baby, have the goodness to explain yourself," commanded Gladys, in a voice still more icy.

"It's difficult in such hot weather," remonstrated Baby, "but I'll try. Isn't it very plain what keeps Rex Thornecliffe here?"

"No, it is not," returned Gladys, each word an icicle.

"You are right; it is *not* plain," agreed Baby, opening her eyes and looking mischievously at her sister. "How lovely you are, Gladys!"

There was a pause.

"If you mean that Rex remains here because of—of me," began Gladys, after a minute's silence, "you're wrong. He likes Nell just as much, and you more, than me. He's fond of you, Baby."

Baby suddenly turned her head aside, and her sister did not see the change in the soft, childish face.

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"Oh, yes, he's fond of me," assented Baby presently. "He thinks me a little girl to be petted and teased. And of course, considering my unfortunate introduction to him, that is the most charitable view he can take. But, Gladys, he loves you. Nell sees it; her rector, her beloved Timothy, sees it; father sees it; and you have seen it, too, haven't you?"

She had turned her head again, and was looking eagerly up at her sister.

"Haven't you, Gladys?" repeated Baby, but without answering, Gladys dashed out of the room.

"What about James Fleming *now?*" called Baby after her, with a burst of elfin laughter, but next moment the mirth vanished from the child's face, and Baby lay still, lost in thought.

James Fleming was the son of the village bookseller. He had had a good education and was superior to his position, so the Norman girls had got into a way of chatting with him when they went into the shop. This had ripened into a kind of friendship with the two younger girls. Nellie's mind was fully occupied with her housekeeping duties and with her future life as the rector's wife, but her sisters had nothing to fill up the empty, aimless days. Both were fond of novel reading, and gladly accepted James Fleming's offer of the loan of new books from his father's shop. The young man arranged to meet the girls in the little wood behind "The Cottage," and exchange the books.

He was gentlemanly, good-looking, amusing, the only young man of their acquaintance, so it was no wonder that Gladys and Baby were glad to relieve the monotony of their lives by spending an hour strolling in the woods with James Fleming. It was soon plain that he was violently in love with Gladys, and Baby sometimes thought it might be imprudent to allow James Fleming to meet them, but she believed implicitly in Gladys, and thought her the wisest as well as the best of created beings. So she said no more about the luckless lover, not even when, some days later, Rex Thornecliffe proposed to Gladys, and was accepted.

It was a lovely August evening, a fortnight later. The three sisters were in the drawing-room, Nellie and Baby reading, Gladys at the piano. Colonel Norman had carried off the two lovers to play cards directly after dinner, and the deserted maidens knew that they should see nothing more of the gentlemen that evening.

It was beginning to grow dusk when a servant brought in a note for Gladys. Baby's book was not interesting, and she idly watched her sister read the note, slip it in her pocket, and rise hurriedly. There were two windows in the room, one a French casement opening on the garden, and through this latter Gladys disappeared with a speed which left Baby breathless, and did not give her time to ask where her sister was going. She was still marvelling when the rector, whose losses at cards had made him desperate enough to rebel against his future father-in-law and break up the card-party, marched into the room, and took a seat beside his betrothed.

"Where are father and Rex?" asked Baby.

"Gone out to smoke a cigar in the wood," replied Mr. Harvey.

An idea flashed on Baby, and in another moment she had darted through the French window and sped to the place in the wood where they had always met the bookseller's son.

There he was, deep in conversation with Gladys.

"It cannot be helped," Gladys was saying, as Baby came up. "You know it must come to an end. We cannot meet you again."

"I know," the lad replied. "It was a liberty to write to you, but—to see you once more—to say 'Good-bye'—I could not help it."

"Gladys, go. Rex is here; and father," broke in Baby. "Go at once."

Gladys gave one startled glance round, and vanished. Baby held out her trembling little hands to Fleming.

"You are not angry?" she said, in a breathless whisper. "We are not ungrateful. It was kind of you to bring us books; it has been very pleasant. But it was foolish of us to meet you. We meant no harm, but it was foolish, and so—it must come to an end. You understand?"

"I understand," answered the boy, taking the two little hands, and looking sadly into the frightened face upraised to his. "I never hoped—anything. But I loved her. I am grateful for her kindness and for yours." He bent his head, and kissed the hands he still held. "My undying love to Miss Gladys," he added, and was gone like a flash.

At the same instant, Baby heard someone breaking through the bushes, and before she had time to escape, Colonel Norman and Rex Thornecliffe were beside her.

"It's Baby. It's my daughter," shouted the Colonel, catching the girl's arm and shaking her violently. "And who was that fellow? Speak out, child. Who was that man? And what were you doing with him at this hour?"

Baby stood motionless and speechless. Her silence enraged her father still more, and her face of ghastly terror convinced him there was something very far wrong indeed. She was hardly conscious. She saw Rex Thornecliffe's shocked and reproachful face, and felt vaguely thankful that Gladys had escaped. Better that she should be thought the sole culprit. The whole story was harmless enough, but it would be so difficult to explain. She knew her father's rigid notions, too, and concluded that Rex shared them. They would think such conduct unladylike, unwomanly. Perhaps Rex, who was looking at her in such a horrified way, might break off his engagement, and that would break Gladys' heart.

"Are you imbecile, girl?" asked her father, with a shake that might have scattered any brains she chanced to possess. "Answer me; who is that man?"

"Be gentle with her," interposed Rex. "Take her home, and she will explain. There is some mistake."

The Colonel pulled his daughter along to the house. Baby made an effort to free her arm and escape upstairs as they entered, but her father held her firmly, and led her into the drawing-room. All looked up in amazement.

"I discovered this girl in a tender interview with a young man," announced Colonel Norman, "and she refuses to tell who he is, or to explain in any way. Nell, do you know anything of this?"

"Nothing," returned Nellie, looking horrified.

"Gladys, *you* know nothing, I am sure," said the Colonel, in a gentler voice. Gladys was as white as her dress, and made a vain effort to speak. "No, no, of course you don't," her father went on. "It's entirely Baby's wickedness, I can see. Now, Baby, you are very young, and I am willing to believe that you have only been giddy and silly, and did not know how wrongly you have acted. Give me the name of the man you met this evening, and tell me how it came about, and how you made his acquaintance unknown to your sisters."

Baby wrung her hands, in mortal anguish, but she never spoke.

"You will not speak," continued her father, in a tone of quiet determination. "You will not confess. Well, then, I will not keep you in my house. You shall go to a strict boarding-school, where your folly will be checked, and you will not re-enter my house till you are ready with a full confession."

Gladys started up.

"Father," she began, but Baby threw herself on her sister's neck, and clasped her close.

"No, Gladys, no," she said, in a hoarse whisper, "don't speak; let me go to school. If you speak, if you say he came to meet you, I shall die." And Gladys kept silence.

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"Letters from home, Gladys," said Rex, stepping out on the balcony where his wife sat, looking down on the foreign scenes below with interest quite unabated although they had now been many months abroad. "Only one for you, though." He handed her a letter, and began to read his own, leaning carelessly against the railing, and softly whistling to himself.

Gladys let the letter lie unopened on her lap. She seldom heard from home. Her father never wrote; Nell, now Mrs. Harvey, had little time for correspondence; and the rules of the boarding-school to which poor Baby had been consigned permitted no letter-writing.

"Any news, Rex?" she asked, after a pause.

"Well, my father thinks we have been long enough away. So, if you like, we might turn homewards now."

"Yes, I think we might."

"Any news from home?" asked Rex, in his turn. "Why you haven't opened your letter yet."

"It's from Nell, and there can't be any news," replied Gladys, breaking open the letter as she spoke. "Nell never has anything to write about."

But as she read her face grew very pale, and she uttered an exclamation of dismay. "Baby, poor darling Baby," she gasped.

"Baby? What of her?" exclaimed Rex. "Poor little woman; is she ill?"

"Very ill. The principal of the school wrote to Nellie, as father is abroad, and Nell had her sent to the Rectory. She has broken a blood-vessel, and is in great danger. Oh, Rex, let me go to her."

"Of course, darling," replied her husband. "We'll be off at once. Poor Baby! poor little thing! her father was too hard on her for a piece of childish folly."

Two days later they reached the Rectory.

"How is she?" cried Gladys, as Nellie met them at the door.

"Just alive," was the answer. "Come and get your things off, and have dinner, and then you shall see her. She's asleep just now."

"You don't mean there's no hope," said Rex. "I can't believe it. Such a bright merry little thing as she was, so full of life and strength."

"She hasn't much strength left now, poor darling," answered Nell, sighing heavily.

"If she dies," said Gladys, in a low, unnatural voice, "she's been murdered. She was always used to such freedom, such love, such indulgence, and that horrid school with its restrictions and confinement has killed her."

As if the knowledge that her beloved sister was near had reached the sick girl in some mysterious way even in her sleep, the nurse came at this moment to tell Gladys that Baby was awake and wanted her.

Gladys was awe-struck at the change in her young sister. The dimpled, rosy face was white and drawn, the blue eyes looked twice as large as before, and the light and laughter had died out of them. Baby languidly held out a skeleton little hand, and a momentary smile parted her pale lips.

"I'm glad to see you, Gladys," she said, simply.

Gladys kissed her with quivering lips, but could not speak.

"Sit down beside me. Let me look at you! Gladys! Gladys!"

The fond utterance of her name overcame Gladys. She laid her head on the pillow and sobbed as if her heart would break. Baby touched the fair hair lovingly.

"Don't cry, dear. You must be happy always, my Gladys. Gladys Thorncliffe."

Something in her tone struck Gladys. She raised her head quickly, and looked at her sister.

"Baby, you loved him. You loved Rex." The words escaped her involuntarily, and no sooner had she uttered them than she would have given worlds to recall them, but they did not agitate Baby. The faintest pink flush came in her cheeks, and died away, but the blue eyes looked calmly back at Gladys.

"I don't know," she said quietly. "Yes, I think I did. But I love *you*, Gladys, and it was for your sake I would not speak last summer. For Gladys' sake; for Gladys' sake."

"And it has killed you. My cowardice has killed you. Oh, why did I not speak out?"

"You mustn't say that," whispered Baby. "I'm glad it is all as it is."

"You were only a child," went on Gladys, "and I was responsible for what wrong-doing there was. It was all harmless enough, but I was frightened, and left you to be the scapegoat. Baby, I will take my share of the blame now. I will tell Rex, and——"

"No, you must not," broke in Baby. "If you love me, you will not. I am quite happy now, but if you tell, I can't die in peace. Promise you won't tell, Gladys, now or at any other time." She raised herself, her cheeks burning with excitement, her eyes wild. "Promise me. Don't you see you are killing me? Promise; promise."

Terrified by her sister's appearance, Gladys gave the required promise, and Baby sank back exhausted. There was a short silence, only broken by the sick girl's hurried breathing.

"Thank you," said Baby, at last. "I'm rather tired now, Gladys, but I'd like to see Rex just for a minute, and then I'll rest."

Gladys fondly kissed her, and went to find Rex, and send him to the sick room with a warning not to stay longer than five minutes. Baby welcomed him with a pretty smile, and a flush on the hollow cheeks.

"You don't look as ill as I expected," began Rex, cheerily, taking the little hand in his, and looking kindly down at her. "You're thin and pale, of course, but that's the confinement of school life. Poor Baby! but you were a naughty little girl to be so obstinate, weren't you, now."

The flush had faded, and her pallor and exhaustion would have alarmed anyone as densely ignorant about illness as Rex.

"It was a childish freak, wasn't it?" he went on, changing his tone. "I mean, your meeting that fellow last summer. You don't know how it has worried me. I know it was nothing but a child's innocent folly, still—it has worried me."

She murmured something of which he could only distinguish two words. "No harm."

"I believe that, little one," he faltered, "but why not have spoken out to your father? Why not explain it to your sisters, or—or—to me, Baby?"

The wide blue eyes looked calmly into his.

"I won't torment you now," he continued. "I am tiring you, and I promised not to stay long. I'll send nurse to you. But when you are well, you'll tell me all about it, won't you?"

She did not answer, but a look of anguish came into her face.

"You're in pain," he said. "I'll send nurse at once. But promise me, dear, that you'll tell me all about that fellow."

She suddenly raised herself in bed.

"Never," she answered solemnly, clasping her hands and looking upwards.

She sank back; the light in the blue eyes went out, and Baby lay dead, her secret untold for ever. But the angels know it.

V. Serkoff.

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LOVE PROBLEM No. 4.

A Little Thing.

Should an Engaged Couple be Completely in Each Other's Confidence?

IT was only a little thing, but it was big enough to make two people very miserable.

The two people were Tom Halkett and Marjorie Page, and it began in this way:

Tom had come into the room quite unexpectedly and had found Marjorie with an open letter in her lap.

She had not heard him come in, and, just for fun, he had stolen up behind her and had looked over her shoulder, pretending to read her letter.

Now the moment Marjorie discovered Tom's presence, she pounced upon the letter, crumpled it hastily, and threw it into the fire.

"That wasn't nice of you," said Tom.

Marjorie turned very red.

"I didn't want you to see what was in the letter." Marjorie never prevaricated.

"So it would seem," returned Tom.

"Don't be angry," she pleaded.

"I'm not angry in the least," he replied, "only—sorry."

"Tom, I've hurt you!" cried Marjorie penitently. "Forgive me, dear; I didn't mean to."

"There's nothing to forgive," said Tom in a cold voice.

"Tom, I know what you're thinking," Marjorie went on hurriedly. "You think I don't trust you."

"What else am I to think?"

"Dear, you are wrong, quite wrong. That letter——"

"Please don't trouble to explain," interrupted Tom proudly. "I've no wish to force your confidence."

"Tom, dear, do let me speak."

"Your action just now spoke volumes. And, really, Madge, I've no curiosity whatever on the subject of that letter. Suppose we talk of something more interesting?"

"If you're going to look at me like that, Tom, I don't want to talk to you at all. One would think I'd committed a crime!"

Marjorie had her share of spirit.

"I'm sorry my looks annoy you so much," retorted Tom. "Perhaps you would like me to go away."

"Go, by all means!" cried Marjorie angrily, and Tom, hurt and puzzled, waited for no second bidding.

On second thoughts, perhaps it was not such a little thing after all.

It involved a lovers' principle hitherto cherished by both Tom and Marjorie—the principle that without perfect confidence there can be no true love.

Marjorie that day had shown, only too clearly, that there was something she wished to conceal from Tom.

It mattered little to Tom whether that something were great or small. It was the principle, he told himself, that mattered.

"The woman who doesn't trust the man she has promised to marry ought never to have given her promise."

They were Marjorie's own words.

Tom smiled bitterly as he recalled them now.

"By her own showing she doesn't really care for me," he thought, with a sinking heart.

For a whole week Tom brooded in solitude over the wretched little incident. He made no attempt to see Marjorie, and the seven days seemed like seven years.

By the end of the week his mind was made up. Marjorie had given no sign. He was persuaded she no longer loved him, and his duty lay clear before him. He would go to her and offer to release her from a bondage which must be intolerable to her.

Circumstances favoured his resolution. Marjorie was at home—and alone.

She came forward to meet him, eagerly, with outstretched hands and a happy smile on her face.

At the sight of his look she hesitated, then her hands fell to her side.

"I was just sitting down to write to you, Tom," she said timidly.

"Then I can save you the trouble," he returned, "unless you prefer to write what you have to say."

His tone chilled her, and for a moment pride struggled with the tenderer feelings in her heart.

Then, with a sudden impulsive movement, she placed her hands on his shoulder.

"Dick, you dear old boy, I want to explain," she whispered. "I can explain everything now. It's a secret no longer. That letter," she went on so hurriedly in her eagerness to be rid of her troublesome secret that the words almost tumbled over one another, "that letter was from Nellie Hastings—you remember Nellie, don't you—and in it she asked my advice about an awful thing she thought of doing, and she said she trusted to me not to breathe a syllable to anyone, and that I was the only living creature she had dared to tell. After that I couldn't let you see the letter, could I? You see, the secret wasn't mine, and it would have been a breach of confidence, wouldn't it?"

And Marjorie looked appealingly at Tom.

"Yes, darling, of course," he murmured contritely.

"Of course I wrote off at once to Nellie imploring her not to do it; I was bound to try to dissuade her, wasn't I? I couldn't bear the thought of her doing it."

"Doing what, dearest?"

"Why, running off with that dreadful Bob Harding. Didn't I tell you? That's what she's done."

"I'm beginning to understand," said Tom.

"She begged for my advice," Marjorie continued, "and then, when I gave it her, she didn't take the slightest notice, but married Bob all the same. I've just had another letter from her. They've run away together, and now they haven't got a farthing, and her father will never forgive her. Poor Nellie! Isn't it horrible? She says she's perfectly happy in spite of everything. Everybody knows about it now, but I couldn't tell you before because it wasn't my secret, was it?"

"No, sweetheart, you were quite right, and I was a fool. I ought to have remembered that some secrets have to be kept even from the people we love, because they don't belong to us."

"But I was to blame too. When I snatched away that letter—Tom, no wonder you felt hurt—I ought to have explained, but you were so proud and angry, and—and——"

"And then you began to feel proud and angry too," concluded Tom, and they both laughed at the recollection—which was a sure sign that they understood each other perfectly once more.

Grete Hahn.

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THE LAST EVENING.

A Tragic Little Story of Two Hopeless Loves.

THE light was growing dim in the studio, but still the artist plied his brush with an appearance of absolute absorption and his model sat listlessly in the old oak chair, seemingly forgetful of her surroundings or occupation.

Then a faint tremor seemed to pass through the room, as if some tension had reached breaking point, and then the artist threw down his brush.

"It's no use," he said, "I can't go on."

She waited silently, and he added with abruptness, giving the key at once to his thoughts—

"You really are going to marry Peterson?"

"I really am," she replied, a little mockingly.

He strode to the fireplace, and stood a moment with his back half turned to her. The model did not stir, but there was a strained expression upon her mouth, and she kept her eyes fixed on the floor.

"I wish you would at least swear to me that you do not loathe him," he said, in a low, passionate voice.

"Swearing is inelegant," she replied, with that same tinge of mockery, "and it is ridiculous to discuss the subject any more."

"I want to save you from a loveless marriage," he answered, and his voice was a prayer.

"To plunge me into a penniless one?"

"Nita, you have no right to say that to me."

The girl bit her lip as if some inward strain were becoming too much for her, while the fire-light flickering into a fresh blaze lit up her loveliness; and the artist held his breath with passionate appreciation.

He came over and leant against the old chair, resting one hand on her shoulder.

"Nita, dear," he said tenderly, "you know that I am not trying to save you for myself. I have seen that that is useless. It is only you I am thinking about. You have had admiration always; but you know that no one has ever loved you as I have, or would do more to serve you."

Her lips contracted sharply, but she did not speak.

"You are so beautiful, Nita," he went on, "and there does not seem to be anyone to look after you properly; and now it appears that you have let yourself be persuaded that you will be happy with this man Peterson, just because he can give you everything that money can buy. It's such a pitiful tale. As if a girl like you could ever be happy without love."

"Who said I was doing it for happiness?"

There was an unusual tremor in her voice, for she had lost her composure a moment in the stress of feeling. Then she drew herself up sharply, as if with an effort regaining her self control.

"What is happiness?" she asked in a hard voice. "Something that one in a million finds. Why should I look to be that one? If I find a way to throttle the miserable, grinding cares of poverty, and have a little peace, isn't that something to be thankful for?"

"Not for you, Nita. It might be for some, but not for you."

She sank back in her chair, and forced the mocking light back to her eyes. "Of course if you will persist in making a goddess of me I can't help it, but in reality I am the most commonplace lump of clay imaginable. I even care about daily bread."

The artist watched her silently. He had known her long enough to see through the mask, if he could not make her take it off.

"I don't quite know why you persist in remaining the lump, as you call it, when you have every capability of becoming one of the Potter's noblest vessels."

"Oh, they often break so easily, and then it is such a pity. What happens to the lump does not matter, and it makes life so much simpler."

"And you think that is the best aim—to make life simple? Why not make it grand?"

"I leave that for those better constituted by Fate, or whatever power it is that tries to make something of the prevailing chaos. When you want a balloon to rise you don't tie it to a dead weight that will drag at it perpetually; if you did the balloon would only become a wreck in the end. I prefer to stay on the ground and not risk it."

"No, you don't," he said almost fiercely. "You know you would give anything to break your bonds and soar—soar—ah, to what heights you might reach!"

"Oh, no," lowering the mask again, "it's a great deal too much trouble for one thing, and such a long way to fall if you should slip afterwards. I'm going to remain an earthworm, and burrow down here for a good home, and all the other creature comforts, which is really being wise in my day and generation, if you could but see it." She strolled across the studio, and rested the tips of her fingers against the mantelpiece, and the toe of one small foot on the fender. "Edward John Peterson, Esq. is a most estimable man," she remarked, with veiled sarcasm, "and he is going to take entire charge of his mother-in-law."

"I suppose that is why you are doing it?" he said miserably.

She shrugged her shoulders and lifted her eye-brows carelessly.

"Have I not said he is a most estimable man?"

Walter Rosney did not reply, but leant his white face wearily against the chair's high back, gazing fixedly at the floor.

Nita turned to him, and a wave of tender compassion stole over her face. He looked so white and ill, the impulse to go to him and tend him as a sick child was almost too strong for her. But when he looked up every trace of it was gone, for she had remembered that she had to help him fight his battle, if she could, as well as fighting her own.

"Listen to me, Walter," she said, steadying her voice with a courage and determination that were heroic. "I suppose it often happens to people that they come to cross-roads in life, when they are obliged to take a new way, and turn their backs on what is gone, however much they wish to continue the same. That time has come for us, and we shall have to say 'Good-bye.' It is as hard for me as for you," her voice faltered, but she pressed on bravely, "but we may not stop to think about its hardness. Marriage is out of the question; you are very poor and very delicate, and I have an invalid mother to keep. It is simple enough; only too pitifully

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simple. I must marry a rich man, and we must say 'Good-bye,' that is all."

His face had grown ashen, she could not bear to look at it, conscious that a momentary weakness on her part might undo the little she had already achieved.

"Couldn't you have waited a little longer?" he asked at last; "perhaps something might turn up."

"Or Mr. Peterson might go!"—lightly; and then with a leisurely step she walked across to his canvas and looked critically at her own nearly finished picture, seeking to lessen a strain that was becoming too much for her by changing the subject and remarking, "It is your best."

"Yes," he answered simply, "I have felt as if I were painting it with my heart's blood."

She stood silent a moment with contracted brows, then turned to him with a gleam of passion in her eyes she could not control.

"Don't let *him* have it," she said, "not even if he offers you a thousand pounds."

A sudden mocking fiend seemed to possess the artist.

"Why not?" he asked. "Think how he would value it—his own beautiful wife!"

She turned very white, but with a great effort mastered herself, though a deep longing seized her to go to him and rest her head against his shoulder as she had done when she was happy a few months ago. She knew he must be suffering terribly to speak to her like that.

"I must be going," was what she said however. "Will you get my cloak?"

He fetched it silently, but as he helped her on with it, he again rested his hand on her shoulder.

"Is the wedding day fixed?" he asked.

"Not quite."

"Then will you come out to dinner just once more? I can get George and Alice to come with us."

She seemed to hesitate.

"Do," he pleaded. "Just once for the old times' sake." And she yielded. When he was alone he went and stood by his canvas and looked at it for a long time. "No, I will not sell you," he said gently. "I would rather starve, for you are all I shall have left soon of my life-dream."

In the murky streets Nita hurried along to the little dingy flat where she and her mother lived. She pulled her collar high about her face, and kept her eyes lowered, for her beauty was too striking to pass unobserved even in a dim light, and she was a girl who shrank from the rude stare of the men in the street. Her mother was waiting for her impatiently.

"Well, is the picture finished?" she asked.

"Practically," and Nita's voice was a little hard.

"Because," continued her mother, "I don't think it is right to Mr. Peterson for you to go and sit for that young man as you do. If I were well enough to come with you it would be different."

"There is nothing to be anxious about," and Nita sat down listlessly to their meagre repast.

"I'm not so sure," her mother replied. "He's only like all other young men, and he's sure to be in love with you, or else fancy he is. I'll be bound he's been talking nonsense to you this afternoon."

Nita bit her lip and looked a little dangerous, but her mother had never learnt tact in dealing with her, and probably never would.

"Has he been making love to you?" she asked, a little coarsely; "because if so I shall tell Mr. Peterson to forbid your going."

"You can tell Mr. Peterson what you like," haughtily; "but if he dares to say a word against any friend of mine there will be a scene, so I warn you. As for forbidding me to go to Walter Rosney's studio, let him try it!"

"Don't go in for heroics," retaliated her mother, in the peevish accent of the confirmed invalid, "even if you are in love with the boy."

Nita's eyes flashed then.

"How dare you!" she cried, "isn't it enough that I am marrying this—this—Peterson, to give you a good home and the things the doctor orders, without your taunting me with what it costs. I insist that you never mention Walter Rosney to me again. You never did him justice. You couldn't—he is out of your sphere altogether."

"That's right! run down your own mother. Oh, I know well enough what you mean; of course I am in the way, and everything is my fault. If it were not for me you would have me believe that you would marry this beggarly artist with one foot in the grave, and go in want all your life. If it were true I should have been thankful that I lived to prevent such folly but I don't believe it—I don't believe a word of it, so there. As if any girl would refuse such a chance for happiness as yours. The man is rich and kind and he dotes on you. In Heaven's name what more do you want?"

Nita's lips curled scornfully but she did not reply; she had long known the folly of attempting to reason with her mother.

"Anyhow, I hope you won't see this Rosney again now the picture is finished," the latter went on, "you have seen too much of him already."

"I went to save you from a loveless marriage," he answered.

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"I am going out to dinner with him to-morrow evening."

"Nonsense," and Mrs. Crossley spoke angrily, "you could not be so foolish."

"Couldn't I?" in that low, mocking voice of hers, "wait till to-morrow and see."

* * * * *

Alice Turner demurred very much when her brother asked her to arrange the little dinner the following evening, but her husband took the artist's part and she was overruled.

"It is only needless pain for both of you," she said, "and as it is impossible for you to marry, it would be far wiser never to meet again."

"We never shall," Walter answered quietly, "after to-night."

Something in his face made his sister cross over to him and rest her hand affectionately on his shoulder. "They tell me Peterson is a good fellow," she said gently, "he will make a kind husband."

"He will not make her happy," the artist replied a little hoarsely, and left the room.

In the evening he met Nita as appointed and persuaded her to go round to his studio to see the completed picture.

"Is this to be our last meeting?" he asked quietly, as he stood before it in silence.

"Yes," she answered, and did not look up. Then —"Are you going to sell it?" she asked suddenly, and he replied, "I would rather die first."

She smiled a little crooked smile at that, and leaning forward pressed her lips impulsively against the wistful drooping mouth of the girl in the picture.

"Good-bye, Nita," she said softly, "you and I must never meet again either. You may love him always and be with him always, but I must forget." A momentary weakness seized her. "How I envy you," she breathed brokenly. "How I envy you, Nita, his friend."

The artist dropped heavily into a chair and hid his face with a groan.

"Good-bye, Nita," she said softly, kissing the picture, "you and I must never meet again. You may love him always, and be with him always, but I must forget."

There were a few moments' painful silence, then she said resolutely: "It is time we were going," and, he could only rise and follow.

They had their little dinner-party at a quiet private hotel where they had been several times before, but London was very full just then, and many curious eyes gazed at the two beautiful women as they passed up the room.

At first they were very quiet, but presently, as if thought were unwelcome to all alike, a wave of gaiety broke over them, and lightness became the order of the hour. No one alluded to the occasion, they only talked on gaily, each vying with the other in brilliancy of conversation. It was like some fateful orgy, in which the partakers heralded with mocking delight, some terrible event of the morrow. A bright spot of colour burnt in the artist's thin cheeks, and his eyes shone unnaturally. "That young man will soon be a patient for some one," said a doctor to his companion, eyeing him professionally.

"Ah! don't say so," she cried. "Can't you see he worships the lovely girl beside him."

"He has no right to marry her if he does," was the seemingly heartless reply, but the doctor's eyes belied his tongue.

Long after the majority of diners had left the four lingered on, and still Walter Rosney talked and laughed, and Nita answered him mood for mood. Had they ever been so merry before? Surely not—and must it end?

No, no—the artist was still holding them all enthralled, pouring out his scant vitality recklessly, as he pitted himself against Time, in a mad effort to make it stand still for that one evening.

At last his sister rose with determination. She was getting a little frightened—there was something so unnatural about it all, and he was beginning to catch his breath as if from a sharp physical pain.

"We will go home for the rest of the evening," she said, "it is too late for a theatre now."

Her husband followed her lead, and called for two hansoms at once, in spite of his wife's unspoken protest.

"It is their last evening," he said as they followed together. "My God! it's making me feel I could cry like a child. How do they do it? It's awful! I'd rather see them looking broken-hearted —it wouldn't seem so horribly unreal."

The lovers reached the house a few minutes first, and stood waiting in the dimly lit library.

"You are glad you came to-night?" the artist asked, catching Nita's hand in both his with a passionate movement.

"Ah! it has been splendid!" he hurried on, without giving her time to speak, "if only it hadn't felt that we were fiddling, like Nero, while Christians burned, or hearts-broke, or something.

"But I have had the best of you, so I am more to be envied than he after all. You will never talk and look like that for him—my queen—my beautiful queen" —his voice broke a little—"and I have seen the lovelight too—my God! he will never see that—Nita, Nita swear he will never see that——"

He was getting over-excited, and seeing it, she sought hastily to calm him, speaking to him in a gentle soothing voice. Then the others joined them, and they all went upstairs to the drawing-room.

"What shall we do?" his sister said. "Shall we have a little music? What shall I sing, Walter?"

She turned to him, and almost immediately uttered a frightened exclamation: "What is it, dear?" she cried; "Aren't you well?"

He tried to smile, but his pallid face only grew distorted with pain, and he swayed a little.

"I—I—it's all over," he finished with a groan, "but thank God, we had to-night"—and as Nita rushed towards him, he fell heavily in her arms.

* * * * *

"Angina pectoris," was the doctor's verdict, "and he must have been suffering from it for some time." Nita wondered if he had known—only it mattered so little now—nothing mattered. All night she had sat by his bedside with his weep-

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ing sister, only no tears had come to help her anguish, and when all was over she was still tearless.

There had been no touching farewell—no improving death bed scene—these things are rare enough in real life. The night had been passed in a sharp succession of heart spasms, which wrung the hearts of the anxious watchers almost past endurance, by their cruel pain. Once or twice he had seemed to watch Nita with conscious eyes, but almost immediately a spasm had blotted out all recollection of aught but the pain.

But as he grew worse she at last gathered him in her arms, and supported his head on her breast to ease his laboured breathing, and then once the faintest semblance of a smile, and a little sigh of content told her that he understood.

But when the grey morning looked into the darkened chamber, the artist was dead.

Later on a woman came alone and stood beside the silent form for a long time—and even in her pallor she was as beautiful as the sunlight.

"Good-bye," she said softly at last. "Good-bye my One Love. It is better that you should lie peacefully there, than have lived to bear the inevitable suffering. For me!—I am strong—and a woman has a heart better tuned to suffering than a man.

"Yet I feel that I too am dead, and, indeed, I think *your* Nita truly died last night with you. To-day she is someone else with a burden of years that must be lived through with another—but *your* Nita is yours for ever. Thank God the last evening of our lives was spent together—it matters so little what comes now."

Gertrude Page.

Robin: "I always kiss my wife when I leave the house in the morning." Dobbin: "I've heard that some men will do almost anything as an excuse to get away from home."

Mr. Hornbill: "Do you know, darling, I could pick you out of a crowd of women just by your style." Mrs. Hornbill: "I don't wonder, and me with this same old dress for the last two years."

He: "What proof have I that you really love me?" She: "Proof! Did I not dance with you at the county ball?" "Yes, but I don't consider that any proof of affection." "You would if you knew how badly you dance."

Mrs. Neurich: "How's my son gettin' along with his lessons?" Private Tutor: "Very nicely, madam, although it is rather difficult for him to catch an idea at times." Mrs. Neurich: "Well, I'll have you to know he don't have to catch 'em. We can afford to buy him all the ideas he needs."

Mrs. Peterby was busy cutting her husband's hair. Their little son Johnny picked up some that was scattered over the floor. "Please, ma, mayn't I have a lock of papa's hair? I want it so badly." "Yes, my child. Just see, George, what an affectionate little fellow he is. That child has more heart than any child of his age I ever saw. He wants to have a lock of your hair as a keepsake." "What do you want it for?" asked Mr. Peterby. "I want to tie it to the tail of my horse; his hair is too thin," replied the affectionate little creature.

£50 FROM ONE READER TO THE REST.

A reader of Short Stories won a prize of £10 in 1894 and with the help of this money emigrated to America making a fortune out of the cycle boom of 1897 and 1898. He recently wrote a letter, under the *nom-de-plume* of "Dayton," to the Editor of Short Stories, inclosing dollar bills to the value of £50, and asking that this money may be offered as prizes in five sums of £10 each.

The Editor has given the matter very careful consideration, and has arrived at the conclusion that, as his anonymous correspondent was in great want when he won his prize, the most satisfactory manner of distributing his gifts of £50 would be to offer them to those who can give the best reasons for receiving them.

You may be wanting to emigrate to one of our Colonies. You may want £10 to buy something you have needed for a long time. You may want to clear off some small debts that have been worrying you. Or you may want to trade with the £10 and, like "Dayton," turn it into a fortune.

Whatever your reason for wanting it may be, write it down in the space below, and send it to "The Competition Editor of Short Stories," Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "Dayton 3," by Tuesday, January 13th.

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A GIRL WHO LOVED AND SAID SO.

Which Brought Both Her and Him Happiness.

The girl stood in the centre of the room, a scintillating figure in the midst of a blaze of light. Her dress glistened and clung, half-hiding, half-revealing the lines of her graceful figure, and trailed in billowy masses about her feet. Her dark hair with its copper and golden glints fell in a loose wave over her forehead, and was gathered into a seemingly careless knot at the nape of her neck.

In reality, there was nothing careless about that or any other part of Beth's costume. She had dressed with great care that night; in fact, she always did if she expected to see Bob, though her heart cried out bitterly at the uselessness of it.

"Why do I try to please him?" she asked herself again and again. "He will never care for me, never. I have cut myself off from any chance I may have had of making him care by my own act."

For Beth had done a thing which, aside from all ethical considerations, is extremely foolish in any girl who wishes to gain a man's highest regard. She had allowed Bob to kiss her. How it came about she never quite understood herself. Other men who had presumed to attempt to gain a like favour had met with crushing defeat—had inspired in her nothing but the utmost disgust and dislike.

If an unprejudiced observer had witnessed the incident he would doubtless have pronounced it the result of strong mutual physical attraction, stimulated by propitious time and place. One night, after they had been dancing together, they strolled out into the garden, where streaks of moonlight and gloom alternated. When Bob spoke there was a tremor in his voice; Beth's pulses pounded in unruly fashion. The spark to kindle the smouldering fire was not long in coming. As they neared the border of a shadowed spot Beth's wrap slipped from her shoulders.

They both reached to replace it and their hands met as they entered the shadow. The next instant she was clasped in his arms, his lips were upon hers.

When Beth wrenched herself free she started quickly away from him, only to pause when she gained the moonlight's brilliant protection and turn upon him wide, serious eyes.

"I ought to be very angry," she declared unsteadily; "and, of course, you think that I am. But I'm not so, I have no right to let you believe that I am." Beth had a way of being brutally frank with herself, and possessed a fanatical sense of justice.

"It's my fault as much as yours, anyway," she continued. "I should have known better than to come out here with you; signs and tokens should have warned me that it was playing with fire. Perhaps, to a certain extent, they did, but I——"

"Beth, I'm a brute—I'm so sorry. Forgive me," he pleaded.

"The 'brute' gets the whip hand of most of us sometimes, I think," she replied quickly; "but this must not happen again, Bob. We're such awfully good friends, you know"—and her voice faltered as she gulped back the sob which was rising in her throat.

For poor Beth had assumed some of this frankness to hide her hurt. Bob must not know how she had been dreaming dreams, how she wrongly interpreted the "signs and tokens," believing that they indicated his love for her, how his sudden passionate kiss had opened her eyes to her mistake. Bob was only her friend, though he did not regard her dispassionately.

"You're a little brick, Beth," Bob assured her; "the idea of you blaming yourself. It's every bit of it my fault, and it's awfully good of you to give me another chance. You can count me more your friend than ever."

They both honestly meant to maintain the standard, but, the boundary once crossed, it is difficult to return to a platonic basis, so it occasionally happened that they strayed from the beaten track.

Sometimes Beth reproached herself bitterly, and vowed that he should never touch her again. At other times she was defiant with herself.

"Somebody will take him from me entirely some day," she argued, "I might as well take my poor little half a loaf while it's within my reach. I'm not hurting anyone except myself—he'd kiss someone else if he didn't kiss me. I shall never marry, so, after all, my kisses are my own to do with as I please."

This evening when Bob arrived she greeted him with the frank familiarity which generally characterised her manner towards him. He looked very, very handsome, so tall and strong, and straight, and her ache tugged so persistently at her heart-strings that she knew she must stay away from him, so, when they arrived at their destination, she flirted desperately with his chum.

It was a weary task at best, and when, towards the end of the evening, Bob led her away to a quiet room where they were quite alone, she was glad enough to rest upon a friendly cushioned couch, even though she felt instinctively that Bob was in what she mentally termed "one of his sentimental moods."

It came, just as she knew that it would. He put his arm around her and she made no effort to resist him.

"What makes you such a witch, Beth?" he questioned as he drew her towards him. "Now you've gone and got poor old Fred in the toils. I was sure you two——"

"Can't you *ever* talk of anything but 'Fred'?" Beth broke in impatiently. "Before I met him you were always saying 'how much I should like him,' and 'how nice he was,' and now, because he is passably civil——"

"'Passably civil,'" echoed Bob, "why he simply monopolises you—cuts me out entirely."

"That's your own look-out," Beth answered with an attempt at flippancy. Somehow his talk of Fred had got on her nerves to-night, and, as he kissed her, he felt that she was trembling.

"What's the matter, Beth?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," she said hastily, trying to draw away from him. He held her close. "Let's go back to the others," she added; then, with a dreary little laugh: "Fred can cut you out some more." Suddenly she turned and flung her arms round Bob's neck.

"Only he can't!" she said fiercely; "no one ever could and you can't see—you don't know—you never will," she confided to the shoulder of his coat.

"Beth, darling——"

"Don't you dare say that to me—you don't mean it and I *hate* you," she flashed at him hysterically, jumping to her feet. "What a fool I am—what *am* I talking about—no, no—

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don't speak to me," and she pressed her fingers over his mouth. Her other hand he had caught again and now she raised his and laid her cheek against it. "I love you, I love you," she wailed; "oh, Bob, I know it's dreadful, but I *had* to say it just once"—and before he could recover from his astonishment she fled wildly across the room.

"Don't ever speak to me again!" she flung at him from the threshold.

"Beth!" he cried, but she was gone.

In the hall she met Fred.

"I'm so tired," she said, "please take me home."

"But where's Bob?" he questioned wonderingly.

"Oh, never mind Bob," she said miserably. "Please take me—and hurry, do."

Seeing that something was wrong with her he obeyed, marvelling greatly.

Beth sank limply into the corner of the carriage with closed eyes and utterly oblivious of the silent man in the opposite corner. She was quite unstrung, her brain was in a whirl. Why had she lost her self-control in that utterly dreadful way? Why had she that night spoken the words that had fought so often for utterance only to be resolutely choked back? Bob despised her, of course. She would never see him again—but suppose she should meet him. She must not; she would go away—she—— She formed a sudden resolution.

"Fred," she said, in a hard, level voice, "I will marry you if you still want me."

A moment's silence, then a man's hand sought hers.

"That's very nice for Fred," spoke a voice from the gloomy corner, "but what about me, Beth?"

"Bob!" she gasped, "oh, Bob, how could you?"

"How could I do anything else?" he questioned very tenderly. "When I saw that Fred was coming with you I threatened all things terrible if he would not let me take his place."

"I wanted never to see you again," she said gravely.

"As we are going to spend the rest of our lives together you're not likely to get that wish, sweetheart. But anything else——"

"Oh, don't, don't," she cried. She was sobbing in his arms now. "Just because you are sorry for me—that is worse than anything."

"I'm sorry that the man you love, and who loves you, oh, so much, is not a better fellow; sorry that you have hidden your love so successfully under the guise of friendship that I was sure I did not have any show at all. Didn't you know that I loved you, dear?"

"There was a time when I thought you did—before that night. But after that——"

"That night, I meant to tell you—to ask you to be my wife. And when you were in my arms I was too happy to speak—I thought you understood and that just then there was no need for words between us. But when you spoke you pulled down all my beautiful castles for you said 'we were such good friends.' You were so gentle with me, I thought, because you did understand that I cared and wanted to show me that you did not."

"I did not want my 'friend' to guess that I had ever thought he might be——"

"Your sweetheart," Bob said. "Always your sweetheart."

And within the carriage, as it rolled quietly through the streets there was the silence of a perfect understanding.

Winifred Alan.

Result of the "Albert Gate Acrostic" Competition.

The Gramophone prizes in the above competition have been awarded as follows:

R. Murdoch, 24a St. Vincent Crescent, Glasgow; W. J. Black, 5 Halldon Street. Erswick Road, Hackney, N.; G. Stevens, 1 Eton Villas, Queen's Road, Cheltenham; F. W. Child, 16 Spilman Street, Carmarthen; F. W. Hook, Commercial Street, Cinderford, Glos.; W. Hastings, 1 Dufferin Terrace, Deal; C. W. Conolly, 43 Nicholas Street, Chester; E. Wilson, 2 Orchard Villas, London Road, Ashford, Middlesex; J. Sewell, The Luud, Lamplugh, Cockermouth; Miss Rita Louise MacLean, 32 South Street, Greenock.

Your Editor Chats.

I would like to call your attention particularly this week to one little story which you will find on page 48 of this number.

It is called "The Last Evening," and is one of those little gems, which when discovered amongst the hundreds of stories, good, bad, and indifferent, which pour into the editorial office of this little paper week by week, make your Editor go home with a happy smile and a contented mind. I really think it is the most powerful little love story of its kind which I ever had the pleasure of presenting to my readers.

The almost endless toil of reading through score after score of tales is amply recompensed by such a reward of labour.

It is with great gratification that I notice the readiness with which readers are hastening to place their confidence in the powers of Miss Cynthia Hamilton for the solution of their love troubles.

All of you who have been readers for the past few months are acquainted with Miss Hamilton's life story, particularly the latter chapters, and I can assure you that she is extremely pleased at the eagerness with which her services are being accepted, and takes a genuine interest in the love tangles brought under her notice.

Next week's cover, I may mention, is a particularly striking one. It illustrates an extremely powerful story in which a wife finds herself forced to leave her happy home and devoted husband, at a moment's notice, without giving those she loves most and best the slightest explanation of her flight or the faintest clue to her whereabouts. I am sure you will like it.

A PRIZE OF £5 A WEEK FOR LIFE.

The Editor of *Pearson's Weekly* is offering the above prize in a simple competition that starts in his paper, published on Friday, January 23rd. The following extract from his Editorial Notice will be interesting to readers:

"It is difficult for one to realise at once exactly what so magnificent an income really means. Men and women have toiled from youth to old age and have never made an income so big as £5 a week. Hundreds of thousands of men and women are to-day earning little more than a fifth of this sum. Their life is one long struggle, without pleasure, without hope.

"It is impossible for us to give a helping hand to every one of these people. It is impossible for us to place them in a position of independence and happiness for the rest of their lives, and we don't contemplate attempting so enormous a task. But it is happily within our reach to benefit at least one such person, and, with this end in view, we make this offer of £5 a Week for Life to the person who shall justify his claim to it under the conditions of the competition which will be announced shortly."

Your Editor.

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Saved by the Cheque Book.

He: "My dear, the bank in which my money is deposited has failed." She: "What a mercy you've got your cheque book at home, love!"

Her One Error in Speech.

Mrs. Chatterbox: "Did you ever make any errors in speech?" Mrs. Wordsworth: "Yes; I made one a few years ago." Mrs. Chatterbox: "What was it?" Mrs. Wordsworth: "I said, 'Yes!?'"

How She was Pacified.

Mistress: "Did anyone call while I was out?" New Girl: "Yes, mum; Mrs. Wayup called." "Did she seem disappointed when you said I was not at home?" "Well, she did look a bit queer, but I told her she needn't get in a temper about it, 'cause it was really true this time."

Probably!

Young Wife: "I want to buy a hat for my husband." Hatter: "What size does he wear?" Young Wife: "I declare I forgot to find out! I know the size of the collars he wears, though. It's fifteen. He'd want about size eighteen or twenty for a hat, wouldn't he?"

A Gentle Hint.

Mrs. Hyflye: "George, dear, while you are having money troubles, I ought to tell you that I learnt to-day why your rival Soapem's credit has suddenly become so good." Mr. Hyflye: "Why?" Mrs. Hyflye: "I overheard someone remark that Soapem's finances must be all right because his wife was wearing such elegant new hats and dresses."

John's Fatal Mistake.

She never knew he was only a waiter, for he had basely told her that he was a gentleman of independent means. One hot day they were sitting in Hyde Park. He felt very drowsy; she felt very loving. "John," she whispered, "do you love me?" "Eh? What?" opening his eyes; "love you, of course I do, darling," and again his eyes closed. "How much?" she asked, and he dreamily said: "Roas' beef, shilling, sir; taters, tuppence; cabbage, penny, sir; bread, penny; half-stout, tuppence; one an' six, please, sir."

Mighty Improvin'.

Parson: "Well, Molly, did you like my sermon this morning?" Molly: "Oh, yis, your rivrence, 'twas mighty improvin'." Parson: "And what part of it did you like best, Molly?" Molly: "In troth, plaze your rivrence, I don't remember any part exactly, but altogether it was mighty improvin'." Parson: "Now, Molly, if you don't remember it, how could it be improving?" Molly: "Now, does your rivrence see that linin I have been washin' and dhryin' on that hedge there?" Parson: "Certainly, Molly." Molly: "And isn't the linin all the better for the clanin'?" Parson: "No doubt, Molly." Molly: "But not a dhrop of the soap and wather stays in it. Well, sir, it's the same thing wid me. Not a word of the sarmint stays in me. But I am all the better and claner for it, for all that."

Quite Impossible.

Papa: "Young man, you want to marry my daughter, and yet you will not give me a list of your friends for reference." Dunstan: "Not much. They were all after the same girl."

Heard at the Holborn.

Guest: "What have you got?" Waiter: "I've got liver, calf's brains, pig's feet——" Guest: "I don't want a description of your physical peculiarities. What you have got to eat is what I want to know."

Preferred Variety in Kisses.

Mr. Bronston: "Where are the sweets, my dear?" Mrs. Bronston: "The pastrycook has left. You'll have to be satisfied with kisses for sweets to-day." Mr. Bronston: "All right. Bring in your French maid."

Looking for a Peer.

There is a charming story being told of a proud American mamma in London. She was speaking of her daughter, and said she was a "peerless beauty." "But she won't be long," she added, after a moment's pause, "if I can help it."

Willing to Oblige.

Master: "What! both want a holiday to-morrow? I can't spare you both at once; Mary, you can have to-morrow, and John the next day." John: "Thank you, sir, but we wanted to get married, and I'm afraid, sir, it can't be done that way, but I'll inquire."

Wasted Violence.

Mrs. Spratt (vigorously shaking her sleeping spouse): "John, John! There's a burglar in the house!" Mr. Spratt (protesting): "Look here, Jane, if, instead of shaking the life out of me, you'd go and shake that burglar, you'd be doing some good."

She Knew Her Husband.

Mother: "Is your letter to your husband ready to post?" Married Daughter: "It's all done excepting the postcript telling him to send me some more money. I'm looking for another sheet of paper." Mother: "Write it across the lines. Married Daughter (promptly): "No, indeed. He'll pretend he couldn't read it."

Extremely Awkward.

Mrs. Wearie: "This is the last time I'll have a girl who can't speak English." Husband: "Why don't you send her off?" Mrs. Wearie: "I've been trying to for six weeks, but I can't make her understand what the word 'discharge' means. She thinks it means a day off, and when I tell her she's discharged, she goes out and has a good time."

That Naughty Little Girl.

She is homely, she is tricky; And, I am greatly grieved to tell, Her hands are always sticky With a chocolate caramel. Her dolly's battered features Speak of many a frantic hurl. She's the terror of her teachers—That naughty little girl. She dotes upon bananas, And she smears them on my knees; She peppers my havannas; And delights to hear me sneeze. Yet—why I can't discover—Spite of every tangled curl, She's a darling, and I love her, That naughty little girl!

Times Have Altered.

"Yes, indeed," said the old man, thoughtfully, after his wife had delivered a dissertation upon the progress of the sex, "the up-to-date woman is vastly different from the old." "I thought you would realise that in time," she returned, rather sharply. "I have just been reading," he went on, "how girls used to be sold by their parents, and some of them brought fancy prices." "But there is none of that now," exclaimed the up-to-date woman, proudly. "Woman has asserted herself, and——" "No, there's none of that now," interrupted the old man. "That's all passed. A man does not buy a wife in these days." "I should think not." "Certainly not. It's all changed, all changed. Now he has to be paid to take her, and her poor old father has to wreck his bank account to provide the dowry. Yes, I admit that the new woman, Maria——" Then the door was slammed and she was gone.

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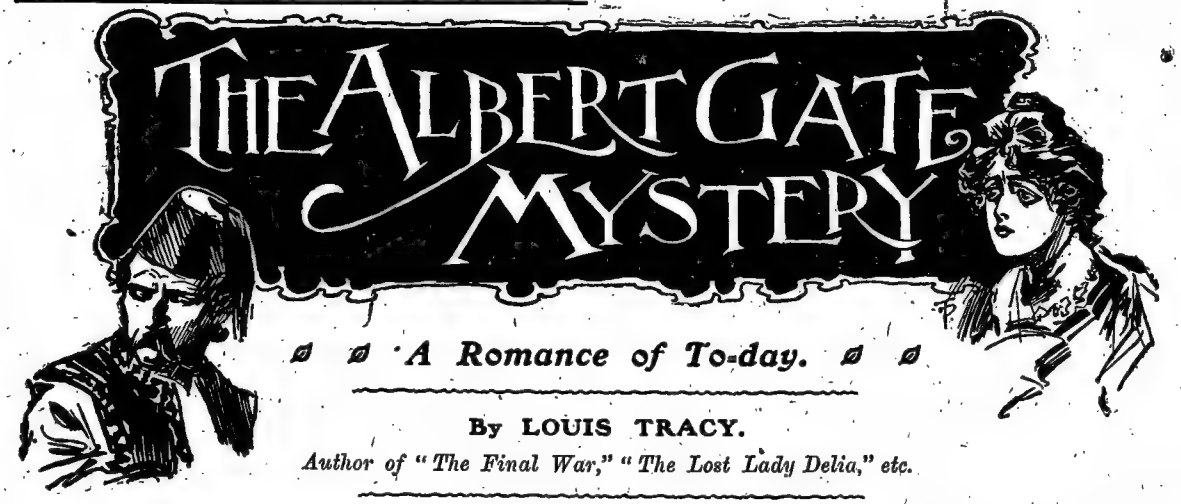
OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.



A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

Mr. Brett's Quest.

A NUMBER of priceless diamonds having been most mysteriously stolen from an Albert Gate Mansion, and four of the custodians of the jewels murdered, Mr. Brett, barrister and detective, in conjunction with the police, is called upon to help clear up the mystery.

The diamonds, it appears, were sent over by the Sultan of Turkey in charge of a number of Turkish officials, and, being of political importance, the mission was placed by the British Government in the care of Mr. Jack Talbot, of the Foreign Office. Upon the night of the robbery and murder, Mr. Talbot disappears.

The Earl of Fairholme, being engaged to be married to Talbot's sister, intrusts Brett with the finding of Talbot.

Brett's first clue is the statement of Mr. Winter, a Scotland Yard detective, that Mr. Talbot and a lady have been seen in Paris, Talbot having signed his name in a hotel register. Brett goes to Paris to see if the signature is genuine.

On his way he falls in with Captain Gaultier, a King's messenger, from whom he learns that Hussein ul Mulk, the Sultan of Turkey's nephew, who had fled from Turkey, is in Paris. Gaultier promises Brett an introduction. Meanwhile Brett has discovered that the signature in the hotel register is not in Talbot's handwriting.

He suspects Hussein of having caused the diamonds to be stolen, and with a view to eliciting information regarding Talbot's whereabouts, in company of Gaultier, pays a visit to the Turk.

This Week's Instalment.

"AH!" he said, "my dear Gaultier, I am so pleased to see you. I did not know you were in Paris. I have been spending an idle moment over cigars and scandal." He spoke excellent French, and appeared to be quite at his ease, but Brett noticed that Hussein ul Mulk had held the discarded newspaper upside down. He was smoking a cigarette, lighted the instant before their appearance, and notwithstanding his Oriental phlegm he seemed to be labouring under intense excitement.

But Hussein ul Mulk could evidently control his nerves.

"Have you had *déjeuner*, or have you time to join me in a cigarette?" he went on.

"We will be delighted," said Gaultier, taking the proffered case. "The fact is, I only heard of your presence in Paris by accident, and I mentioned the fact to my friend here, who has interested himself in the Armenian cause in London. He at once expressed a keen desire to make your acquaintance, so I ventured to bring him round and introduce him to you. This is Mr. Reginald Brett, an English barrister, and one who keenly sympathises with the reform movement in Turkey."

"I am delighted to know you, Mr. Brett," said the suave Oriental. "It is naturally a great pleasure to me to make the acquaintance of any influential Englishman who has given sufficient thought to Eastern affairs to understand the way in which my country suffers from a barbarous and unenlightened rule."

He delivered himself of the foregoing with the glibness of a born agitator, yet all the while he was inwardly wondering what could be the true motive of the visit paid him by this distinguished-looking stranger, and Brett was silently resolving to startle Hussein ul Mulk out of his complacency at the earliest possible moment.

"It is an even greater pleasure to me," he said, "to find myself talking to a reformer so distinguished as you. Your name is well known in Europe. Indeed, in some quarters it has come to be feared, which in this world is one of the signs of success."

Hussein ul Mulk was puzzled, but he remained outwardly unperturbed.

"I was not aware," he said, "that my poor services to my country were so appreciated by my English friends."

"Ah," said Brett, with a smile that conveyed much, "the achievements of a man like you cannot long remain hidden. I have good reason to know that at the present moment they are earnestly attracting the attention of the Foreign Office."

Hussein ul Mulk became even more puzzled, and, indeed, exhibited some slight tokens of alarm lest Brett's vehement admiration should reach the ears of others in the adjoining room.

"Really," he said, "you flatter me. Will you not try these cigarettes? They are the best; they are made from tobacco grown specially for the Sultan's household, and it is death to export them. I understand that the cigarette habit has grown very much of recent years in England?"

"Yes," said Brett, "it certainly has developed with amazing rapidity. In trade as in politics this is an age of astounding achievements."

Gaultier knew that there was more behind the apparent exchange of compliments than appeared on the surface. Having fulfilled his pledge, he said hurriedly, "Both of you gentlemen will understand that I cannot very well take part in a political discussion. With your permission, Hussein, I will now leave my friend with you for a half-hour's chat, as I have an appointment at the Café Riche."

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Although Hussein was profoundly disconcerted by Brett's manner no less than his utterances, he could not well refuse to accord him a further audience, so Gaultier quitted the apartment and the Englishman and Mussulman were left face to face.

A Telegram from Paris.

Brett felt that he was called upon to play a bold game. Under some circumstances he knew that to throw away the scabbard, and dash with naked sword into the fray, was the right policy.

"I came to see you, Hussein ul Mulk," he said, speaking deliberately, "not only because I have an interest in the progressive policy voiced by the young Turkish party, but on account of matters which are of a personal interest to you, and to friends of mine in England."

The Turk bowed silent recognition of the barrister's motives.

"You are aware," said Brett, "that a large number of valuable diamonds were stolen from the special envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, in London, last Tuesday night, and that the theft was accompanied by the murder of four of the Sultan's subjects and the abduction of a prominent official in the British Foreign Office?"

It is difficult for an olive-skinned man to turn pale, but Hussein ul Mulk did the next most effective thing for one of his race. His face assumed a dirty green shade, and his full red lips whitened.

For some few seconds he strove hard to regain his composure and frame a reply, but Brett, nonchalantly puffing a cloud of smoke into the intervening space, and thus helping his hearer to control his emotions, went on:

"Pray do not trouble to deny full knowledge of the fact. It is far better for men of the world like you and me to discard subterfuge when engaged in grave and difficult negotiations. I do not propose wasting time by describing to you the details of a crime with which you are thoroughly acquainted. Let me say, in a sentence, that my chief, perhaps my only, motive in coming here to-day is to secure the release of my friend, Mr. Talbot, from the place where he is at present confined, and at the same time to obtain from you a statement which will satisfactorily clear Mr. Talbot in the eyes of his superiors of all personal complicity in the Albert Gate incident."

Again there was a breathless silence.

Hussein ul Mulk had regained his nerve. He was now considering how best he could dispose of this Englishman who knew so much. To purchase his silence was too hopeless. He must die as speedily and unostentatiously as possible. So he answered not, but thought hard as to ways and means.

Brett, in imminent danger of his life, disregarded all semblance of danger. He leant back in his chair, closed his eyes in complete enjoyment of Hussein's cigarettes, which were really excellent, and said, in the even, matter-of-fact tones of one who discusses an abstract problem:

"Of course, my dear friend, you are thinking that the best answer you can give me is to strangle me or to shoot me, or to adopt any other part of the drastic policy which finds favour in Constantinople. But let me point out to you that this will be a serious error of judgment. I have not come here without safeguarding my movements. You are aware that Captain Gaultier, a trusted Foreign Office Messenger, brought me here in person. Some members of the British Government, and several important officials of Scotland Yard, know that I am in your house and discussing this matter with you. If any accident were to interfere with my future movements, you would simply precipitate a crisis quite lamentable in its results to yourself, to your association, and to your cause. You will see, therefore, Hussein, that to kill me cannot really be thought of. A man of your penetration and undoubted sagacity must surely admit this at once, and we can then proceed to discuss matters in a friendly and pleasant manner."

At last Hussein found his tongue. "I have never met you before, Mr. Brett," he said, "but you interest me."

Brett smiled and bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Of course I admit nothing," went on the Mohammedan.

"Of course."

"Least of all do I admit that I contemplated any breach of hospitality towards yourself."

Brett waved his hand in deprecation of such a pernicious thought.

"But you will understand," went on Hussein ul Mulk, "that it is quite impossible for me to even attempt to discuss fully the interesting facts you have brought to my notice without some inquiry on my part, and on yours some proof that the events concerning which you have informed me have really happened. You see one cannot trust a newspaper They get such garbled accounts of occurrences, particularly of State affairs; they are misleading——"

"Excuse me, I am sure you will admit that although I dispensed with details in my brief statement, the facts were undeniable. I can tell you exactly how and why Mehemet Ali and his two secretaries, together with Hussein, his confidential servant, were murdered. But the circumstances were revolting, and need not be unduly discussed between gentlemen. I can tell you how the diamonds were obtained from the Albert Gate mansion, and how they were conveyed to Paris. But as they are probably in your possession, and the main object of your enterprise has thus been accomplished, it seems to me that all these otherwise dramatic effects are needless. I have told you exactly the object of my visit, and I still await an answer."

Hussein ul Mulk laughed a trifle uneasily.

"On my part, monsieur, I might attempt to question the extent of your knowledge, but as you are mistaken in one part of your summing-up of evidence, you may be wrong in others."

"To what do you allude?"

The Mohammedan reflected for a moment, and then answered:

"I can see no harm in telling you that I am not aware of any diamonds in which I am personally interested having arrived in Paris."

"Indeed," said Brett, leaning forward in his chair, and instantly dropping the listless air which had hitherto characterised his utterances. "That is a very curious thing, because the diamonds have been in Paris at least two days, and if they have been withheld from the possession of those who employed certain agents to secure them, there must be a powerful reason to account for the delay. Speaking quite disinterestedly, monsieur, I would advise you to inquire into the matter at once."

His words evidently perturbed the Turk.

"Do you mind," he said, "if I leave you alone a few minutes? I wish to consult with a friend of mine who happens to be staying here."

"Assuredly," said Brett, "but let me beg you to leave your cigarettes behind. They are exquisite."

Hussein ul Mulk had never before encountered such a personality as Reginald Brett. His eyebrows became perfectly oval with surprise and admiration for the man who could thus juggle with a dangerous situation.

"Here is my case," he said, "and when we have concluded this most interesting conversation I hope you will leave me your address, so that I may have the extreme pleasure of sending you a few hundreds."

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Then he quitted the room. He was absent fully five minutes.

On his return he said :

"In the opinion of my friend, Mr. Brett, it is impossible for us to do anything at the present moment. We must inquire ; we must verify ; we must consult others. You will see that the negotiations you have undertaken require on your part some display of the extreme delicacy and tact in which you have given us so admirable a lesson. Suppose now we agree to meet here again to-morrow at the same hour. Am I to understand that what has transpired this morning remains, we will not say a secret, but a myth, a mere idle phantasy as between you and me ?"

"That is precisely my idea," said Brett. "One hates to mention such a brutal word as 'police' in an affair demanding finesse. Personally I hate the blunderers. They rob life of its charm. They have absolutely no conception of art. Romance with them can end only in penal servitude or on the gallows. Believe me, Hussein, I am very discreet."

In another minute he was standing in the street, and inhaling generous draughts of the keen fresh air of Paris.

"I wonder how much my life was worth during the first five minutes ?" said he to himself, and then he made his way to a telegraph office, where he dispatched the following message :—

"To the Earl of Fairholme, Stanhope Gate, London—Have received definite intelligence which confirms my views. Expect our friend will be discovered within forty-eight hours. If possible, join me at Grand Hotel, Paris, to-night, eleven o'clock. BRETT."

What Happened in the Rue Barbette.

PENDING Fairholme's arrival Brett was not idle. He visited a prominent jeweller in the Rue de la Paix, and after making some trivial purchases led the conversation round to the question of diamonds. By skilful inquiry he ascertained a good deal about precious stones, both in their crude and their finished states. The accommodating Frenchman showed him a good many samples of South African, Brazilian, and Indian stones, and explained to him the various tests which were used to determine their value.

Brett had no special object in seeking this information, but when engaged in elucidating any mystery he made it an invariable rule to post himself as accurately as possible concerning all minor details which might by any stretch of circumstances become useful.

When he returned to his hotel he jotted down some notes of this conversation, and whilst engaged in the task a telegram arrived from the Earl of Fairholme announcing that nobleman's departure from London by the afternoon train service *viâ* Boulogne.

Punctually at the time appointed the Earl reached the hotel. He was all eagerness to learn what had happened since they had last met in London, and why Brett had so suddenly summoned him to Paris.

"I really have not much definite information," said the barrister. "Thus far I am building chiefly upon surmise, but I have undoubtedly come into contact with the persons who organised and planned, if they did not carry out actually, the raid on the Albert Gate mansion."

"Then you have news of Jack ?" asked Fairholme.

"Not exactly. All I can do at present is to assure you that the scent is hot, and we may run our quarry to earth some few minutes after eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I am jolly glad that there is a chance of my being useful in this matter," said the Earl gleefully. "If only I am a little bit instrumental in recovering her brother, Edith hasn't got a leg to stand upon in the matter of getting married. That's awkwardly put, isn't it ? What I mean is that when Talbot is restored to his family and everything is satisfactorily cleared up, Edith and I can get spliced immediately, can't we ?"

"I think that is the most assured fact we have yet encountered," said Brett, pleasantly.

(*Continued on next page.*)

COLD WEATHER!

HOT BOVRIL!!

"But you haven't told me yet the exact manner in which I can be useful."

"No," said the barrister, "I have been revolving in my mind the possibilities of to-morrow morning, and you must play an important part in what, by chance, may turn out to be a melodrama. Now, listen to me carefully. In the neighbourhood of the Porte St. Martin there is a street known as the Rue Barbette. At eleven o'clock to-morrow I go to the house No. 11 in that street, and you will accompany me as far as the door. It will be your duty to stand outside and take note of all persons who enter or leave the house once I have disappeared from view in the interior. You must exercise your powers of observation most minutely, paying heed to the height, build, complexion, and clothing, of any one, male or female, who enters or leaves No. 11 Rue Barbette, after you have taken your stand in the street. It is more than probable that no person will call for scrutiny, unless it be some chance tradesman's assistant visiting the building in pursuance of his ordinary work. However that may be, do you feel capable of attending to this part of the programme?"

"Perfectly," said Fairholme.

"You will maintain watch until 11.30. If at that hour I have not rejoined you, make your way to the nearest policeman, and tell him that you have good reason to believe that a friend of yours has either been murdered or suffered serious personal injury, in a room on the second storey of the house in question. You will then, in company with the policeman, come rapidly to the apartment I have indicated and demand an immediate entrance; if necessary bursting the door open."

"And what then?" gasped the amazed Earl.

"I really don't know," said Brett imperturbably. "It is possible that you may find my mangled remains in one of the inner rooms. The best I can hope for is that I shall be simply a prisoner, but I fully expect to be seriously injured at the very least."

"But look here, Brett; are you doing the right thing in this matter? Why on earth should you run such an awful risk, and take it alone, too? Isn't it possible to obtain some trustworthy detective to keep watch on the street, and let me go into the place with you? Don't you see, old chap, that two of us might make a reasonable show if violence is attempted? One man hasn't much chance."

The barrister cut short his friend's protestations.

"I sent for you, Lord Fairholme," he said, "because I felt that I could trust you to obey my instructions implicitly. This is a matter in which I do not want the police to interfere. My visit to the Rue Barbette to-morrow morning may end quite satisfactorily. If it does, we shall be in possession of important information which should lead to the prompt release of Mr. Talbot. If it fails, there will certainly be some shooting or stabbing, or perhaps an attempt may be made to keep me a prisoner. This latter eventuality renders the presence of the police essential. No matter what has happened to me, they will, with your assistance, be able to take up the inquiry exactly where I leave it off. In this notebook here, which I am placing in a locked drawer"—and he suited his action to the words—"you will find details of all that I have done up to the present moment, together with the lines along which future inquiries should proceed. In particular you will find an elaboration of the theory which I expect to-morrow's visit to confirm. You fully understand me? All this anticipates that after 11.30 to-morrow I shall be personally unable to conduct the investigation further."

"Yes," said the Earl, with rueful emphasis. "I fully understand the proposition, and I tell you what, Brett, I don't like it. There has been enough blood spilt in this beastly business already, and I feel a sort of personal responsibility for you, you know, because I brought you into it."

"Then," said the barrister, with a laugh, "I solemnly acquit you of any such responsibility. I am going into the business with my eyes open. It interests me strangely, and I would not abandon the quest now upon any account."

"But can't you explain matters a little more clearly? Is it necessary that I should be kept in the dark as to the circumstances which have led up to this critical movement to-morrow?"

"Not in the least," said Brett. "It is indeed very important that you should comprehend all that has gone before; I only started at the end, so to speak, so as to fix accurately in your mind your part of the business, which now stands separate and distinctly outlined in your memory. What I am going to tell you simply leads up to the expected denouement."

He then recited to the wondering Earl the whole of the curious events which had happened during the preceding twenty-four hours.

It was late when they got to bed, but they rested well, and, after the manner of their race, fortified themselves with a good breakfast against the trials of the day, whatever these might prove to be.

A few minutes before the appointed hour they quitted a fiacre in the vicinity of the Rue Barbette, and at eleven o'clock Brett passed the concierge, whilst Fairholme took up his stand outside.

The barrister was received with smiling complacence by Hussein ul Mulk. On this occasion he was conducted to another room of the apartment, and he of course promptly noted that this time the windows looked out upon the rear of the building, whereas during his previous visit he could survey the street.

"This looks badly," said Brett to himself, but he betrayed not the slightest unwillingness to fall in with the arrangements made for his reception, and lounged back in a comfortable chair so easily that not even the quick-witted Turk suspected that the barrister's hip pocket contained a very serviceable revolver.

Hussein ul Mulk commenced the conversation. "I have," he said, "a couple of friends here who are interested in the matter you were good enough to mention to me yesterday. With your permission I will introduce them, and he threw open another door with a single Turkish word which Brett imagined was an invitation to enter.

Two men came from an adjoining room. They were Turks—swarthy, evil-looking customers, but well-dressed, and evidently persons of consequence in their own country. The new-comers eyed the barrister curiously, and with no very friendly intent so far as he could judge.

A brief conversation in Turkish resulted in Hussein ul Mulk addressing Brett.

"I must apologise for the fact that my friends here only speak their native tongue. Before we proceed to business I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Certainly," said Brett, "go ahead."

"You mentioned to me yesterday that you had no desire to invoke the aid of the police in prosecuting the inquiry which interests you."

"Quite right," said Brett.

"May I ask if you have adhered to that intention?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, Mr.—Mr."—Hussein ul Mulk consulted a visiting card—"Mr. Reginald Brett, I think, is your name? It would be idle on my part to compliment you on your bravery, but it would be still more futile to attempt to conceal from you the danger of the position in which you now stand."

"Sit," corrected Brett, still smiling.

"Well," said the Turk, "we will not quibble about words. The fact remains, Mr. Brett, that you have heedlessly thrust yourself into an enterprise of such a

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desperate character that all interlopers can be dealt with only in one way."

"You kill them," said Brett airily.

"Yes," said the Turk, "I deeply regret to inform you that you have guessed the object of my remarks with the singular skill you have already betrayed in reaching the existing position. I can only add that I am surprised the same skill did not influence you to avoid forcing upon us the only alternative left."

"Am I to be killed at once?" said Brett, speaking with a slight affectation of boredom.

Even the self-possessed Turk could not conceal his amazement at the manner in which this strange visitor conducted himself. "This is a point we have not yet decided," he said. "We are strangely unwilling to take the life of such a brave man as yourself. If we were assured of your silence, we would even be disposed to permit you to escape this time, with a solemn warning not to cross our path again. But we feel that clemency is out of the question. There is one hope—a slight one, it is true—which may permit us to gag you and tie you securely in this room, where you will be left in peace for at least forty-eight hours, after which time a telegram could be dispatched to any address that you choose to supply us with. But really, owing to unforeseen circumstances, this chance of a reprieve is remote. It all depends upon the arrival, or otherwise, at this house, of a gentleman whom we expect at 11.15."

Brett leant forward in his chair, and took out his watch. The others misunderstood his movement, and each of the three men promptly produced a revolver.

Brett laughed quite heartily as he said: "Really, gentlemen, your nervousness is ludicrous."

He saw that he yet had five minutes' grace before his self-constituted judges would proceed to execute their sentence upon him. As for the Turks, they were manifestly ashamed of having betrayed such trepidation, and they each of them replaced the weapons so readily produced.

"That is a point in my favour," thought Brett. "Next time, if I do wish to reach my revolver, I may be able to get a draw upon them first."

A Revelation.

"DURING the interval," said Hussein ul Mulk suavely, "is there anything you wish to do—any letters to write, or that sort of thing?"

"No," said Brett, "I do not think so; it seems to me that you have thoroughly misunderstood the purpose of this meeting. I came here in order to obtain from you particulars which will lead to the release of Mr. Talbot and redeem his character in the eyes of his superiors. I did not come here to be killed, Hussein ul Mulk. I am not going to be killed. If you touch a hair of my head you will only leave this house for a prison, and subsequently for the gallows. And so, you see, you are talking childishly when you dangle these threats and preliminaries to immediate execution before my eyes. It is not you, but I who have been called upon to dictate the terms on which we will part. It may perhaps interest you to explain this new phase of the situation to your fellow countrymen, and the matter will also serve to kill the few minutes which yet have to elapse before 11.15."

Hussein ul Mulk made no direct reply to this remarkable speech. That it impressed him was quite evident from his manner. Forthwith an animated but subdued conversation took place between the triumvirate.

While it was yet in progress a peculiar knock was heard upon the outside door of the apartment.

"Ah, he comes," said Hussein ul Mulk in French. He left the room in order to meet the new arrival. Then he returned, bringing with him a man very different from those whom Brett had thus far encountered in connection with the crime. This was a dapper little Frenchman, wizened, black-haired, and dressed almost in the extreme of fashion. He at once addressed himself to the barrister.

(*Continued on next page.*)

A Cabman's Story.

A reporter of our contemporary, the *Weekly Budget*, has elicited in the course of an interview a very interesting story. The narrator was a London cabman, and he was describing the wonderful manner in which bile beans for biliousness restored his health, which had been broken up by the effects of a cold.

"You will hardly believe it," he said, "but I can assure you that I was often so dizzy and upset that I could not, for the life of me, think of, or utter the name of the street to which I was driving, although, mind you, I knew it perfectly well. But, let me tell you exactly how this state of affairs arose. "About last Christmas I caught cold. I thought I had got over that, but by-and-bye, I 'went off my food,' and got very low and depressed. All the energy seemed to go from me, and my eyesight became very blurred. I had terrible headaches and experienced a general feeling of heaviness. All the food I took seemed to turn sour. I got so bad that I really could not eat, and rapidly began to lose flesh. I went to a doctor for advice, and he said my liver was the cause of the trouble. He gave me some medicine, but this only afforded me temporary relief, and I became worse than I was at first. One day my niece advised me to try bile beans for biliousness. I followed her advice and sent to the chemist's for a box. They did me so much good that I procured another box and determined to give the beans a thorough trial. The result of this course of action has been that they have now completely restored me to health, and I shall ever be grateful to them."

"By-the-bye," continued the cabby, "I shall be very pleased to tell any other sufferers what benefits I received from the beans, and if you like you can have my name and address. It is G. Mansfield, 17a, Williams' Mews, Lowndes Square, S.W. I shall always swear by bile beans in cases of liver disorder, indigestion, and headache." Bile beans are a certain cure for these ailments, also for biliousness, constipation, piles, anæmia, and all female ailments, colds, chills, lumbago, rheumatism, and influenza's after effects. They cost one and three halfpence, or two and nine a box, at all chemists, or from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, E.C. They are sold in sealed boxes only; never loose; and they form an excellent prevenative as well as a curative medicine, for workers, who, like cabmen, are exposed to all weathers.

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"They tell me, my friend," he said, "that you have thrust your nose into this little pie which the friends of his Majesty the Sultan are preparing for him. It is a bad business. You are too soon for the banquet. The result is that your poor little nose may get burnt, as the pie is still being cooked."

The man smiled maliciously at his feeble witticism, and Brett instantly took his measure as a member of the gang of flash thieves which infests Paris. He knew that such a ruffian was both pitiless and cowardly. Whatever the outcome of the situation which faced him he would not stoop to conciliatory methods with this despicable ruffian.

"I suppose," he said, "that the only part of the affair which concerns you is the robbery."

"Well, and what if it is?" said the other.

"I can only say," replied the barrister, "that your political friends will be well advised to keep a close eye upon you, for you would rob them just as soon as the persons against whom they have employed you."

The little thief laughed cynically. "You are right, *mon vieux*. I would be delighted to have the chance. But this time it is impossible. The stones are too big. They are worth—pouf!—millions of francs, so I must be content to receive my pay, which is good."

"Have you intrusted the Sultan's diamonds to the care of a scamp like this?" said Brett, addressing himself to Hussein, and inwardly resolving that unless the conversation by chance took a turn favourable to himself, he would forthwith open fire upon the gang and endeavour to escape.

"Yes," said the conspirator with a triumphant smile. "You have never seen them, Mr. Brett? Here they are. To many men the sight would be a pleasant one. To you it should be terrible, for the arrival of these diamonds at this moment means that you must die."

So saying he produced from an inner pocket of the frock-coat which he wore a large, plain morocco case. The pressure of a spring caused the lid to fly back, revealing to the eyes of those in the room a collection of stones which were marvellous by reason of the size and magnificence of each of the diamonds on exhibition.

In the centre reposed the Imperial diamond itself, and for an instant Brett thought that whilst the senses of the other men were fascinated by the spectacle, he would have a good opportunity to shoot some of them down without mercy and make a dash for liberty.

But at the same moment there came to him an odd thought. His friend, the jeweller of the Rue de la Paix, had not given him in vain a lesson during the previous afternoon.

The barrister suspected—in fact, he was almost sure—that the gems now flaunting their half-revealed glories in the light of the day—for not one of them had undergone the final process peculiar to the diamond cutter's trade—were not the real stones stolen from Albert Gate, but well-fabricated substitutes.

To his acute brain there came an immediate confirmation of his theory. Evidently the diamonds had not been previously in the Turk's possession. The little Frenchman had just delivered them, and this in itself was a strange circumstance in view of the fact that the genuine stones must have been in Paris at least three days.

Brett concentrated all his dramatic faculties in look, voice, and gesture, when he cried:

"You fools, to be taken in by a device which a child might have suspected. These are not the Sultan's diamonds. These are frauds, cleverly concocted bits of crystal and alum, intended to keep you happy until you got back to Constantinople and discovered how thoroughly you had been deceived."

"You lie!" roared the little Frenchman. "They are genuine."

Brett wanted to punch the diminutive scoundrel heavily in the face, but he restrained himself. Turning with a magnificent assumption of courteousness to Hussein ul Mulk, he said:

"Come, I told you were acting childishly; this proved it. A most outrageous attempt has been made to swindle you, if I may use such a term to persons who confessedly are plotting to rob another. Surely this will convince you that you have nothing to fear from me. I am not here as the agent of the Sultan or the police. It is a simple matter for you to verify my statement. All that is necessary is for one of your party to take any of those alleged diamonds—I would suggest the smallest one so as not to create suspicion—to any jeweller in the district, and he will test it for you immediately, thus proving the truth of my statement. Look here; I will convince you myself."

He took the monster diamond irreverently in his hand before Hussein ul Mulk could prevent him and turned to the window. He pressed the stone against the glass and tried to make it cut, but it failed. He placed it against his cheek. It was warm. A pure diamond would be icy cold. More than this, a small portion of the composition of which the imitation had been hastily concocted, broke off in his fingers.

"You see," he laughed. "Do you require further proof?" Even whilst he spoke the diminutive little Frenchman turned and bolted.

One of the Turks drew a revolver and rushed after him, but Hussein ul Mulk uttered some authoritative words which prevented the man from firing. The Frenchman was evidently an adept in the art of dodging pursuit. In the passage he ducked suddenly, and threw the Turk heavily to the ground. Then without further interference he slipped the latch of the door and slammed it hastily behind him, leaving Brett silently laughing at Hussein ul Mulk and his remaining confederate, whilst the gentleman who had been upset was slowly regaining his disturbed gravity.

"Can it be possible that what you say is true?" said Hussein ul Mulk, in such piteous accents that Brett was moved to further mirth.

"Surely you do not doubt the evidence?" he said; "take any of these stones; they will crumble to pieces on the hearth if struck the slightest blow. See, I will pulverise one with my heel."

And he did so, though the amazed and despairing men whom he addressed would have restrained him, for they still could not bring themselves to believe that what he said was true.

"Come now," said Brett, "rouse yourselves and give me the information I want. I promise that that is the only way in which you may attain your ends. Of course I cannot help you. It may be that as you have bungled matters thus far the authorities will stop you and land you all in prison, but that is no concern of mine. And this moment I simply wish to release my friend and proclaim his innocence. For the rest you must take care of yourselves."

Hussein ul Mulk was the first to recover his scattered senses

"We cannot choose but believe you, Mr. Brett," he said. "We are even indebted to you for making this disastrous discovery at such an early date. We paid our agents so highly that we thought their honesty was assured. We find we are mistaken, and consequently we apologise to you for using threats which were unnecessary. We rely upon your honour not to incriminate us with the police at this moment. All we can tell you is that your friend is not dead, but we do not know his whereabouts."

"Nonsense," cried Brett angrily. "Why, do you seek to mislead me in this fashion?"

"Sir," said the Turk, "I am telling you the truth. We believe that Mr. Talbot has been held a prisoner in London, but we do not know in what locality. My friends here and myself, as you have already surmised, are merely members

(*Continued on page* 62.)

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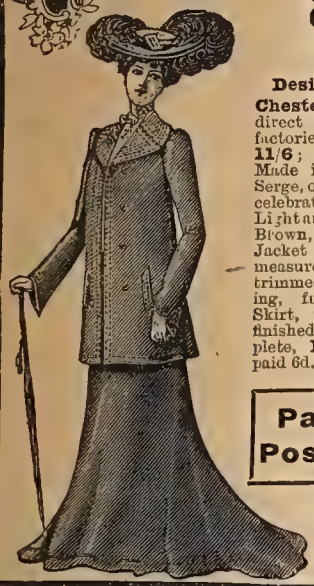

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of a political organisation. It was necessary for us to secure possession of the Imperial diamond and its companions. We spared no expense, nor hesitated at any means that would accomplish our purpose. We have been foiled for the moment, I can tell you nothing else, and I now advise you to leave us and forget that such persons exist, for I swear to you by the beard of the Prophet that had events turned out differently you would now be a lifeless corpse in this room, whilst your body would not be discovered for many weeks, as we intended to leave Paris this afternoon as soon as the diamonds came into our possession."

At this moment a thunderous knocking reverberated through the house.

The Turks gazed at each other in affright. None of them moved to open the door. But the knock was not repeated, for the door itself was thrown bodily from its hinges, and the stalwart form of Lord Fairholme, accompanied by two policemen, appeared in the passage.

"Ah," said Brett, jumping forward, "I had forgotten about you, Fairholme. I see you kept your appointment. These gentlemen are not required," he rattled on pleasantly, turning towards the stern-looking policemen; "I am quite alive and uninjured. My friends here and myself had a few carnesti words, but we have settled matters satisfactorily."

The suspicious policemen glanced from the smiling Englishman to the perturbed Turks. At the first sound of danger Hussein ul Mulk had closed the case in which lay the spurious diamonds, so these pretentious-looking gems could not excite the curiosity of the men of law.

The senior officer commenced to demand an explanation from Lord Fairholme of the exciting statements which induced them to accompany him, but Brett stepped into the breach to explain matters.

"It is quite true," he said, "that my friend was anxious on my account. It was even possible that these Turkish gentlemen here and myself might have proceeded to extremities, but now the affair has ended satisfactorily, and if you will allow me——" He put his hand into his pocket and a slight monetary transaction terminated the incident pleasantly for all parties.

Soon Brett and Fairholme found themselves in the street, and again did the barrister draw in deep and invigorating breaths of Paris air.

"Where now?" said Fairholme.

"Tell me," cried Brett eagerly, "did you notice in which direction the little man ran who left No. 11 about ten minutes ago?"

"Better than that," said Fairholme, "I heard where he was going to. He was in such a fiendish funk that he noticed no one nor anything, only flung himself into a passing cab and yelled, 'Take me to the Cabaret Noir, Boulevard Montmartre.'"

"Good," cried Brett, excitedly. "You are a splendid detective. You have saved me hours of search and perhaps days of failure. Come on; let us, too, go to the Cabaret Noir."

The exterior of the Cabaret Noir belied its name.

Originally no doubt, it was one of the vilest dens in a vile locality, but the fairy hand of the brewer had touched the familiar wine shop, and, behold it glistened forth in much mahogany, more brass, and a dazzling collection of mirrors.

Brett was surprised when the driver of their cab pulled up in front of such an ornate establishment. Somehow he expected the Cabaret Noir to be a different place. Not so Fairholme, accustomed only to the glaring exterior of London tied houses.

"Here we are," said his lordship cheerfully. "Let's take them by surprise and run over the whole show before any one can stop us."

"No," said Brett; "this is Paris, and the police here have ways even more mysterious than those of Scotland Yard. We will gain nothing by such drastic procedure. Indeed, had I known the sort of place we were coming to I would have visited it to-night and in disguise. As it is, we have been seen already by anyone interested in our movements, and it would be useless to adopt any pretence, so follow me."

He boldly entered through the main door, and found himself in a light, airy room, filled, in three-fourths of its area, with little marble-topped tables surrounded by diminutive chairs, whilst a bar counter was partitioned off in a corner.

The attendant in charge was a dreary-eyed waiter, who seemed to think that the presence of a couple of sight-seeing Englishmen at such an hour was another testimony to the lunatic propensities of the Anglo-Saxon race. He welcomed them volubly, assuring them that the establishment kept the best Scottish whisky in stock, and guaranteed that roast beef would be ready in ten minutes.

(To be continued.)

HE: "I'd go through fire and water for you, dear." She: "Never mind that. Would you go through the operation of making a fire for me?"

THE small boy had been warned by his nurse as to the awful results of biting his nails. "If you bite your nails," she said "you will swell out like an air balloon and burst." The small boy believed, took heed, and didn't bite his nails any more. The small boy went to a children's party, where he stood and gazed at the hostess for some minutes in silence. Then he spoke: "You bite your nails," he said.

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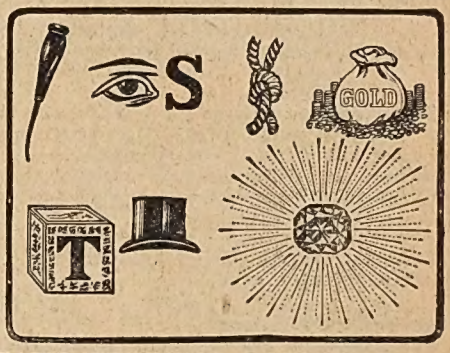
Now, sometimes our contests seem very simple, and perhaps the one below may appear so, but on this point we wish to put you on your guard. Don't say "What a fool that man is. Does he take his readers for children?" No, we do not, but still you are apt to make a mistake and "jump at conclusions." What we want you to do is to solve this rebus correctly; take your time about it, even consult authorities, or consult your friends, and then if you think you are right post your answer. Probably very few will send in the right solution. Remember there is only one correct answer—the original quotation, but the prizes are worth the effort. Find the words and arrange them correctly, and remember that some of the most brilliant men of letters living have on examining this rebus given an incorrect answer

We shall give **£75 in Cash** for the correct reading of this rebus which represents a learned saying. We wish you to understand that **there is no trick or catch** about this puzzle for it is a veritable quotation from a famous author who died in the second decade of the 17th Century, and one that has been often repeated. If you cannot find and arrange the six words in this rebus correctly, but only find five, you will participate in a Second Prize of **£50.** Now here are **£125** being given in two prizes alone, and someone is going to win the money. Is it not worth a trial? There is only one easy condition, which by the way does not involve your selling anything or putting your hand in your pocket for a penny. About this we will write you on receiving your solution.



An envelope containing the correct answer has been sealed and deposited with our bankers, and will not be opened until after the close of the contest. In the event of more than one correct solution, we shall appoint a committee of three from among the contestants to award the cash *pro rata*. The expenses of the committee will be paid to London, and **£1 per day** allowed to each while away from home. You may be asked but not compelled to act as one of the committee.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Doffing the Hat.

"F. W. H." writes: "Is it etiquette to doff one's hat to a lady with whom one has danced at a ball? My friend says 'yes'; I am in doubt, but think not."

* * * *

The rule of raising one's hat to a lady with whom one has only a slight acquaintance is: "Wait till the lady shows signs of recognising you, then raise your hat." The initiative in resuming a slight acquaintance rests with the lady. If she does not show a disposition to resume it, then you must take it that you are not advanced enough in her favour. However, if you should meet again, and enter on to a more intimate relationship, there could be no excuse for her in not recognising you in the street or elsewhere.

The Servant's Knock.

"SHOULD a servant always knock on entering a room?" asks "MARY," who is a housemaid. "I am in service in a fairly good family, and my mistress has not told me one way or the other about this."

* * * *

It is not usual in the better families for a servant to knock, that is, of course, in a sitting-room. It is different in the case of entering a bedroom, or, say, a study. I should advise you not to knock on entering except when you have reason to believe people are engaged in private conversation. Of course you will not enter suddenly without knocking when Miss Kitty or Miss Ada is receiving a gentleman friend. That would make you very, very unpopular.

Accepting an Invitation.

"SOPHIE" and her intimate girl friend have been invited to spend a day out with two gentlemen whom they met at a dance. The programme will include a day in the country, with a late dinner afterwards. Should they accept?

* * * *

Well, "SOPHIE," there are certain girls who would not think twice about accepting such an attractive invitation, but they belong to a different class of society from yourself—that is, they are girls of the Bohemian stamp, who don't try to be conventional. With them, it does not very much matter, as they do not care "what people say." But, in your case, where I should say you are living with your parents and have a lot of neighbours who are friends, I don't think you should do this kind of thing. If the men had been really inclined to treat you well, they would have asked your parents' permission, or have invited someone to chaperon you. But don't let me appear prudish. There is nothing at all terrible about their suggestion. It all depends on exactly what sort of girls you are, and how far people are likely to judge your conduct by ordinary standards. Lastly, your parents should know what you are doing, and, if they consent, I don't see that you need trouble yourselves.

The Older Girl.

"BILL," is eighteen, but looks twenty-one. He is fonder of girls older than younger than himself. Now he is enamoured to some extent of a girl of twenty-three, who seems to be mutually attracted by him. He does not know whether she takes him seriously enough to think he should become engaged to her, but thinks that if she knew his real age she might think him too absurdly young and not want his society.

* * * *

Now, a girl cannot be very fond of a man if she would object to him on account of his youth. I imagine she likes you for yourself, and the fact that you are five years younger could not alter that feeling. I should tell her your age, and leave her to act as she likes. She will almost certainly not expect any proposal from you, but I do not see why you and she should not be good friends. After all, she is old enough to know her own mind, and to look after herself, so I should leave the matter in her hands.

A Wrong and a Right.

"A. S. D." (Exeter) asks me the following: "The wife of a business friend of my husband called on me, but did not leave any cards. I did not like the woman at all, as her manner showed that she thought our social positions were not equal. Now, should I return her call, seeing that she made a technical offence in not leaving cards?"

* * * *

An excellent opportunity, "A. S. D.," for you to prove that you are not a social inferior by displaying better knowledge of the usages of society. Call on her and leave your cards—one for yourself, and two of your husband—and be as nice in your manner as she was otherwise. As she is the wife of a business friend of your husband, you may be serving his interests by showing courtesy to her. Certainly do not omit to return her call. That would be a social mistake.

Absent Versus Present.

"CONNIE" was a year ago very much impressed by a young man who has since gone to India for three years. He did not show in any way that he was similarly drawn towards her, but "CONNIE" thinks if they met again something would develop. However, another man has now appeared on the scene and is making definite overtures. "CONNIE" does not like him so much as the man in India. Do I advise her to listen to the second man's protestations, or to wait until the first one returns?

* * * *

You are not sure about the man in India. In fact, things suggest that he is not drawn towards you to any extent. If he were, he would certainly have shown it in some way when here, or by writing to you from abroad. Therefore, you had better not think of him. Decide whether you care for the second man sufficiently to think of him at all. That should be the deciding factor. If so, then allow him to continue his attentions, and see if in time you do not get to reciprocate them. If not, of course, and you still harbour thoughts of the man in India, better straightforwardly tell the man now paying you attentions that you do not feel that you could love him. It would be better to make the truth known before matters have gone too far.

Asking Parents.

"WILDFLOWER" is meeting a young lady of eighteen, but her parents do not know he is fond of her. Should he ask their permission to meet her? Yes, "WILDFLOWER," certainly. If your intentions are serious, and you are very fond of her, and think one day you will be able to offer her a proposal, let her parents know about it.

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According to the publishers, the aim of this startling little free book is to answer such questions as occur to all interested in the mysterious relation between mind and matter.

Such questions as these, for instance:—Can I learn how to hypnotise? Why is the art not more widely known? Just how should I set about it to learn at home, and practise it? Is instantaneous hypnotism possible? What is "personal magnetism," and how is it acquired? What is the mysterious secret of the wonderful success and influence of certain people who seem most ordinary in other ways? Is there really a scientific mode of life or thought which attracts health, success, and happiness? Is it possible to thus radically change one's whole life in a few days, as many claim to have done? Is it true that humanity in general is, in a sense, hypnotised by conventionality and thus blinded to splendid opportunities for success and happiness which lie on every hand? What can I do to arouse myself from this "hypnosis of custom," and rise to the attainments which my natural ability would warrant? What must I do to become a hypnotist? To develop a magnetic, attractive, forceful character? To acquire courage, ambition, cheerfulness? To kill fear and worry? To make myself a source of happiness and inspiration to my friends?

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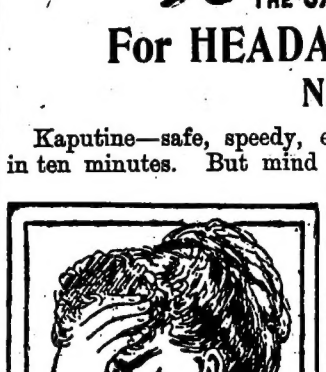

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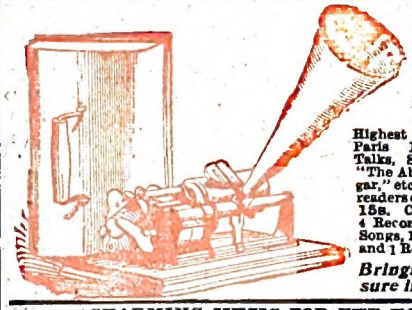

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